



BENJAMIN DISRAELI, ESQUIRE, M.P., 1836

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DISRAELI:

THE ALIEN PATRIOT

BY

E. T. RAYMOND

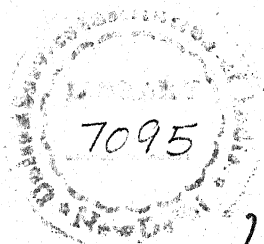
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CHAPTER I

“**N**OBODY,” said Lord Morley in explaining the poverty of his borrowings from the enormous mass of Gladstone’s letters, “had fewer secrets, nobody ever lived and wrought in fuller sunshine.”

Of Gladstone’s great rival almost the exact opposite is true. Disraeli valued the sunshine only as a superlimelight, to give the finishing touch to some theatrical display of himself. He used mystery as a weapon and enjoyed it as an amusement. He not only loved secrets ; he made himself a secret, and the secret, truth to say, has survived his biographers as well as himself. From the record of their public activities it would be possible to compile a not incredible life of most of his contemporaries. The result would be dull, but it would not be absurd. Peel, Bright, Gladstone, Russell, Derby, O’Connell, Cobden, would stand out, not indeed as complete men, but as recognisable human figures. Disraeli thus treated is either a monster, as in hostile analyses of his character, or a piece of barber’s waxwork, as in the pages of his panegyrists. Gladstone’s speeches are very Gladstone ; the man who innocently played the Jesuit with himself is one with the politician whose jesuitry enchanted one party and exasperated the other. But we can never be sure of the real Disraeli in Disraeli’s speeches, however rich in objective truth ; nor in his table-talk, however spontaneous in seeming ; nor in his letters, however frank and familiar. For the speeches were always those of a man at once deferential and contemptuous of his audience. The table-talk was sometimes a means to self-intoxication, and sometimes a means to the intoxication of others. Every letter, however trivial, had its

purpose, often another than the ostensible one. Disraeli was not a mere comedian ; there was a real man, and a great man, beneath his many stage disguises. But for long the real man was so situated that he could only exist, as some insects do, on condition that he seemed to be something other than he was, and this business of seeming he managed so cleverly that it is only on occasion in the six fat volumes of his official biography that the inner truth concerning him flashes on the reader.

I have called Disraeli the Alien Patriot. History is richly strewn with examples of the man of foreign blood who serves the country of his adoption with the fidelity of a native, and often with more than the native's enthusiasm. We find him in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, cornering wheat for his adopted country. He is busy, with every tool of the creative ruler, in the England of the Conqueror. He does a commendable work, though not consciously as "founder of the Mother of Parliaments," in the England of the Plantagenets. He is a constantly recurring figure in French history. He buys Paris at the cost of a mass, and becomes the father of a people whose every weakness he watches with cynical clearness through the cool eyes of a foreigner. He is found in the simar of a Cardinal, keeping together the distracted France of the Fronde. A century or a little more later we meet him, stiff with the correctitude of a Genevese banker, ineffectually seeking to stave off revolution by improved book-keeping. By a trace of Irish accent the Alien Patriot is to be distinguished in every court and camp of eighteenth-century Europe, and even Hindus in the Carnatic and mestizos in Chile note some strangeness in the names of Lally and O'Higgins. In the nineteenth century Alien Patriots of English or Scottish blood are found everywhere fighting, working, or scheming for their adopted countries, and one of the miracles of the Great War was the undoubted loyalty to England of men of princely German blood.

But while every nation supplies its examples of the Alien Patriot, it is natural that the species should be most richly represented by the nation without a country.

The Jew may become, in relation to the land of his adoption, a true patriot, but he must always remain, for a multitude of purposes, an alien ; and it is an injustice to his patriotism to gloss over his alienism. If we treat an honest Jew as one who has thrown in his lot with England or France, Spain or Germany, but cannot by the nature of things be English, French, Spanish, or German, we know exactly where we are. We appreciate what seems to us admirable, we understand what seems to us less admirable, we are not perplexed by what may be in itself neither good nor bad but is simply foreign. But if we insist on regarding the Jew as an Englishman, a Frenchman, a Spaniard, or a German in no way differing from other Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, or Germans, we shall not only be wrong about him, but in the wrong with him. He will have as much contempt for our eulogies as for our censures. The Jew, though he may bear insult "with a patient shrug," does not like being called "misbeliever, cut-throat dog," and has a very natural loathing for anybody who "spits upon his Jewish gaberdine." But he is probably little more partial to the Christian who, with all possible good humour, compliments him on the possession of the special virtues of a race he deems the inferior of his own. A Jewish audience will, no doubt, cheer loudly when a parliamentary candidate appeals to it to show once more the traditional British liking for fair play. But in its heart of hearts it despises its Christian flatterer, and will exclaim with Shylock, and not unjustly, "How like a fawning publican he looks," and "hate him for his low simplicity." For the Jew, whatever outward reverence he may pay for policy's sake to the code of the Gentile, wavers not in his conviction of the superiority, not only of his own great Law, but of his own minor rules concerning the game of life. What we call "cricket" may often fill him with contempt ; but he has a "cricket" of his own which, if we took the trouble to study it, might fill us with respect, and even fear. We take no such trouble, and are therefore irrationally angry with a Jew who proves

his Jewishness in one way, and irrationally admiring of him when he displays it in another. And when, as in the case of Benjamin Disraeli, some of us decide to make the Jew a British hero, we bind ourselves in advance to gloss over or apologise for the things of which he was probably most proud, and to glorify the things which he said or did with some shame simply because it served an immediate purpose, minor and perhaps ignoble, to say or do them.

To keep steadily in mind that Disraeli saw facts, and was bound to see them, being a man of genius with an outlook the opposite of insular, in a light very different from that in which they could appear to the Englishman of the nineteenth century—this is the only means of understanding both the fundamental sincerity of the man and the incidental insincerities of the statesman. In the year 1529 fell Cardinal Wolsey, the last Englishman of European mind to control the policy of England. Nearly three and a half centuries were to pass before a mind equally capable of viewing European civilisation as a whole exercised dominion over the nation's destinies. In the interim many stupid, a few brilliant, and one or two sagacious men determined the part played by England in European affairs. But, whatever their natural ability or acquired knowledge, none of them escaped the handicap of a defect of vision. They were the victims of one great illusion which was the teeming parent of all sorts of minor errors. In the contempt of what they called the Roman superstition they overlooked the importance of the philosophy of life represented by the Catholic Church. They confused Catholic economics with Catholic theology. In their hatred of the Papacy they set out to destroy what had grown up under the Papacy. In their war on the tares they plucked up much good wheat. It was no accident that Disraeli, when he spoke, not as a politician but as a political philosopher, took Cobbett's view of the Reformation in England. It was as little an accident that he surveyed Europe's problems with something of Wolsey's breadth of vision.

But while Wolsey saw England, and England's place in Europe, with the eyes of one belonging to a universal Church, Disraeli saw it with those of one belonging to a universal race. Wolsey was an Englishman; Disraeli was a Jew. The vision of the Victorian statesman was not less clear than that of the Tudor. But his mind was that of an alien, and his heart was not that of an Englishman. He conquered England, he governed England, he even came to love England. But it was always as a foreigner that he saw England, and, though he was very willing to do England a service, he lacked the quality of the true patriot—he was not willing to sacrifice himself for England. He saw more clearly than any of his contemporaries the dangers before his adopted country; on occasion he indicated them honestly and in terms of appropriate emphasis. But there always came a time when, finding expostulation without avail, he acquiesced with a cynical shrug of the shoulders in the very follies he had denounced, and went on with his other business—the making of a career.

Two circumstances have contributed to the obscuration of the vital fact that Disraeli was not only born a Jew but throughout his life thought, felt, and acted as a Jew. Both his friends and his enemies, for very different reasons, concurred in glossing over his Judaism. To the Conservative Party Disraeli, after long years of suspicion, became a sort of political saint. It grew to be a habit to appeal to "Disraelian principles" as if they had the force of the Decalogue. Accepting Disraeli (who once talked—and that late in life—of the Colonial "millstone") as the representative of Imperial Britain, it would have been treason to think of him as lacking anything English but an English name. On the other hand, whatever Liberals might mutter in private, however they might chuckle over Carlyle's "superlative Hebrew juggler," they considered it inconsistent with their latitudinarian professions to apply the adjective Jewish to the conduct and character of a Jew. It was part of their creed that "liberal institutions" made all men liberal; it was but a slight extension of the

proposition to maintain that they made all men alike.

And indeed it is difficult, if one looks only to the more obvious aspects of Disraeli's political life, to realise that we are dealing from first to last with a man of alien modes of thought. The man was an actor, and one of the thorough kind, who often blacked himself all over. He caught all kinds of cant with ease and could talk it with conviction. Moreover, like the French Marquess in *The Newcomes*, he was fond, especially in his later years, of playing the Englishman. Being a man of an uncertain sense of humour (though of a brilliant and abundant wit), he sometimes allowed the performance to descend to the ridiculous; with his corkscrew ringlets and pallid face he sat at farmers' ordinaries, bestowed brass-buttoned blue coats on meritorious old labourers, punched fat cattle, and did other things only meet and proper to cropped heads and beefy jowls. But the comedy could take a more refined form. Disraeli could not, being a Jew, look an Englishman. He could not, being a Jew, generally feel like an Englishman. Whenever he tried to speak as a great Englishman speaks under the stress of deep emotion or on the inspiration of a splendid idea, he failed miserably. But, being a man of astounding cleverness, he could borrow at will the spiritual equivalents of the Tory's breeches and gaiters, the Manchester man's hard hat, or the Chadband's white tie. He could adopt without difficulty English prejudices, compromises, and mental confusions. He could never expand himself to English greatness, but he could squeeze himself easily enough into most English limitations. Thus, we can read to-day many columns of his political speeches without recognising anything—except vivacity of expression—to mark them from the common form of Victorian parliamentary eloquence; it is only at rare intervals that we pause on something that no Gladstone, no Derby, no Russell or Peel, no Roundell Palmer or Roebuck could have said.

But the man who evades us when he is dealing with

facts is not grudgingly revealed when we turn to his works of fiction. It is in the Disraeli novels, if anywhere, that we find the real Disraeli. In any novel which is more than a mere narrative much of the truth concerning the author will out, and Disraeli could no more hide himself than could Dickens, Thackeray, and Meredith in their day, or Mr. Wells and Mr. Bennett in our own. Vivian Grey is as much Disraeli as David Copperfield was Dickens and much more than Kipps and Mr. Polly were Mr. Wells. And whatever Vivian Grey was or was not, he was certainly not English. The story of his school-days outrages every English tradition. To begin with, he becomes at once "the most popular fellow in the school" because he is "a dandy . . . so dashing . . . so completely up to everything." Compare this in passing with the opinion of Master East, surely a more trustworthy authority on the mental habits of young English barbarians, who told Tom Brown that safety lay in having "nothing odd about him." But Disraeli's hero cannot be recognised as an English boy, and his school-fellows are as foreign as he. Vivian is as surely an Oriental as Prince Djalma was a Frenchman. He treats the usher Mallett as a "species of upper servant." Mallett, in revenge, sets the other boys against him; there is something of the same story in one of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Vivian then plans a double treason. Currying favour with the master, sneaking on the boys, he so contrives matters that an intolerable tyranny produces desperate revolt. Four stout fellows seize the unhappy Mallett, four make a rush on Vivian :

But stop: he sprang upon his desk, and, placing his back against the wall, held a pistol at the foremost: "Not an inch nearer, Smith, or I fire. Let me not, however, baulk your vengeance on yonder hound; if I could suggest any refinements in torture, they would be at your service." Vivian Grey smiled, while the horrid cries of Mallett indicated that the boys were "roasting him."

It would be difficult, in a few pages, to reveal a more complete freedom from all the prejudices, conventions, taboos, standards, and ideals which Englishmen, if they

do not always observe, at least profess to honour. Vivian Grey alone would testify that his creator, though clearly a man of spirit, knew not "cricket." But Vivian Grey does not stand alone. Contarini Fleming is equally emancipated from the slavery of the unwritten law of the English; he is perhaps, indeed, even more authentically Oriental. At school he fights a boy two years older than himself, whom, attacking "like a wild beast," he fells to the ground:

He was up again in a moment; and indeed I would not have waited for their silly rules of mock combat, but *have destroyed him in his prostration*. But he was up again in a moment. Again I flew upon him. He fought with subtle energy, but he was like a serpent with a tiger. I fixed upon him: my blows told with the rapid precision of machinery. His bloody visage was not to be distinguished.

After ten rounds Contarini's enemy "fell down quite blind." The hero, with his knee upon the boy's chest, demanded an apology, which was refused:

I lifted up my arm. Some advanced to interfere. "Off," I shouted, "Off, off." I seized the fallen chief, rushed through the gate, and dragged him like Achilles through the mead. At the bottom there was a dunghill. Upon it I flung the half-inanimate body.

We do not feel here the presence of a coward. The schoolboys' fight could not have been described except by one who as a schoolboy knew what it was to give and receive hard blows; and Disraeli, as we know, was no poltroon. A little later he was always ready for a duel, and in his schooldays, no doubt, he did not shrink from a bloody nose. All the world knows what sort of a pugilist the Jewish race can produce. There is courage in Contarini—the spirit of a man. But not the spirit of an Englishman, or, for that matter, of a European. The point of view is simply Oriental; it comes straight from the Old Testament; the man who wrote thus in his twenties was clearly one in mind and spirit with those terrible Hebrew warriors who, not content with conquering, must extirpate, and, not content with killing, must humiliate—the men who ripped up women with

child and cast the bodies of beaten kings to the dogs. Somewhat later we find this alien tone less marked ; there is less bitterness—or perhaps more prudence. But, in some degree, it can be detected in everything that Disraeli wrote. Whenever he is stirred to sincerities, we find in him the Jew.

But it is important to realise exactly what kind of Jew he was. "I am pure Sephardim," says Sidonia to Tancred. Disraeli made the same boast. Between the Jew who comes to England by way of the Mediterranean and the Jew of Russia, Poland, and Germany there may or may not be genuine racial differences, but there is certainly a real divergence in temperament. The Jew in the north and east of Europe was uniformly subjected to a treatment which could not fail to depress character. He lived in countries where he stood forth not only an unbeliever, but a most obvious alien ; and even had he embraced Christianity he would still have been marked, by the fierce and uncultured peoples among whom he dwelt, as an intruder and an inferior. It was otherwise in those Mediterranean countries which, inheriting the necessarily liberal philosophy of Rome, made little distinction of colour and race. Here the Jew might be persecuted as the member of an exclusive sect ; he was not branded as a separate and contemned sub-species. The Sephardim were Jews who had settled in Spain before the coming of the Goths. Under the Roman power they had ranked with other citizens. Naturally, they resented a new order which implied their bondage, and it was, according to Gibbon, largely their help that ensured the swiftly decisive conquests of Tarik and his successors. While the Moslem sway endured the Jews lived on equal terms with the victorious Moors. Later, when the Christian sword had recovered a large part of the lost territory, some at least of the Spanish Jews fared far from ill. From the thirteenth to the beginning of the fifteenth century we read of Jewish statesmen, scholars, and physicians at the Castilian Court, and such persecution as they may have suffered was neither continuous nor systematic. To the

Jew who wished to share the full life of the Spanish Christian there was, moreover, no obstacle but his faith. He could enter the always open door of the Catholic Church. Once that portal was passed he was safe from everything but the suspicion which must attach to conversion bringing clear and immediate advantage to the convert. Vast numbers of Spanish Jews did in fact so conform. Gibbon estimates at ninety thousand the number who received baptism under the Gothic prince Sigebut, and Prescott records that St. Vincent Ferrier, some centuries later, by his own efforts won some thirty-five thousand of the race to the Cross. The "Nuevo" found no bar, social or political. He married into the proudest Spanish families. He rose to positions of power and dignity in the State. In the Church itself he obtained high preferment. But he remained race-conscious, and the loyalty of the converted Jews to the State which thus tolerated and promoted them was in many cases incomplete. It was not a Roman Catholic historian, but the sceptic Gibbon, who affirmed that "the alliance between the disciples of Moses and of Mahomet was maintained till the final aera of their common expulsion."

The "new Christians" suffered a fiery persecution under Ferdinand and Isabella. The latter part of the fifteenth century was, all over Europe, especially an age of intolerance and an age of irresponsible power, and the policy of the Spanish sovereigns, as of the English Henry VII, aimed directly at the depression of the nobility. The exceeding prosperity of the Spanish Jews doubtless did much to sharpen what we (who have our own intolerance) are pleased to call "bigotry," though in fact the purely political motive was no less strong than the desire of the Most Catholic monarchs to extirpate heresy. The family of Disraeli seems to have been among the nominal Christians who secretly adhered to the ancient faith and ceremonies, and their descendant gloried alike in this conformity of convenience and in the immediate resumption of Judaism when, having left Spain for Venice, the exiles could dispense

with an hypocrisy prolonged over six centuries. Out of gratitude to the God of Jacob for their preservation they assumed, according to Lord Beaconsfield, the name of D'Israeli, "never borne before or since by any other family, in order that their race might be for ever recognised." This latter statement is inaccurate, since Benjamin, the first to land in England, seems also to have been the first to adopt the style of *un homme à particule*, his predecessors having been modestly content to write themselves Israeli. Benjamin the elder came to England in 1748, as London correspondent of the family firm. He enrolled himself as a member of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue in London, but did not mix intimately with the Jewish community, and his second wife, who brought him a fortune, was still less disposed to the society of her own race. Though undoubtedly connected with the house of Villa Real, aristocrats of Jewry, "the second most illustrious family of Portugal," according to Sichel, "and thrice intermarried with our own nobility," she constantly deplored, as a social obstacle, her husband's name, and his adhesion, however formal and careless, to the faith in which he was born.

In such a household an excess of religious temperature was not to be expected, and Isaac D'Israeli, the father of Lord Beaconsfield, grew up an agnostic, though for many years he maintained a nominal connection with the synagogue, and broke away at last only because he was offered a choice between accepting a definite office and paying a substantial fine. Isaac had no turn for business; he was an only son; his father's position was comfortable; and with all his mildness he was not an easy person to dominate. Benjamin the elder therefore resigned himself, after several attempts to establish the young man in commerce, to what must have been a heavy disappointment. Isaac, a born bookworm, became one of that "unprosperous race of men," as Adam Smith has it, "called man of letters." Before he was thirty he made himself a name by his *Curiosities of Literature*, which still survives, but his

verses in the Augustan manner found little favour even in his own time, and his studies of the Stuart period are chiefly interesting as foreshadowing certain aspects of his distinguished son's Toryism. His contempt of commerce, expressed in heroic couplets in his nonage, is also to be remarked as probably influencing in some degree the younger Benjamin, whose suspicion of "Dutch finance" was always coupled with his contempt for the "Venetian constitution" of the Whig system.

In 1802 Isaac Disraeli married Maria, the daughter of Joshua Basevi, an Italian Jew, and sister to George Basevi, an architect of some eminence. Mrs. Disraeli, a woman of gentle and domestic character, the precise antithesis of the "demon," her mother-in-law, who, according to Lord Beaconsfield, "lived until eighty without indulging a tender expression," gave birth to five children, of whom the great Benjamin was the second. Though doubts exist as to the date and place, it is now generally accepted that the favourite Prime Minister of Queen Victoria was born on December 21, 1804, at a house in King's Road, Bloomsbury, now known as 22 Theobalds Road. Lord Beaconsfield himself said, "I was born in the Adelphi, and I may say in a library." The first statement has been definitely disproved. The second was merely a literary man's exaggeration of the fact that books were to be found almost everywhere in his father's house, and that some of them probably littered Mrs. Disraeli's bedroom.

Of Benjamin's early youth the records are shadowy, and, as with much else, the novels are the best authority. Vivian Grey's father, it will be recalled, "was for Eton," but his lady was "one of those women whom nothing in the world can persuade that a public school is anything else but a place where boys are roasted alive." There seems to have been a similar difference of opinion in the Disraeli family. Isaac had thoughts of a public school; Mrs. Disraeli, with maternal realism, saw that figuratively at least her boy would have to pass through the fires of persecution. Benjamin was therefore sent to a succession of private schools, of which

one was kept at Blackheath by a Mr. Poticary and another at Walthamstow by Dr. Cogan, a Unitarian and a good classical scholar. Even here the lad had his troubles. Vivian Grey, it may be remembered, is called by one of the masters a "seditious stranger," and the cry of "No stranger!" is taken up by a hostile faction among the boys. The words as they stand have no meaning; they become significant if we read "stranger" as "Jew," and "seditious" as "misbelieving." The passions and miseries of Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming, "who detested school more than he had ever abhorred the world in the darkest moment of experienced manhood," were the passions and miseries of Benjamin Disraeli. He it was who was "born with a detestation of grammars"—and even a certain incapacity to be grammatical, since he could rarely write a long sentence without a slip. He it was who felt "the folly of learning words instead of ideas," and who indulged all sorts of heroic day-dreams which made the prose of his situation as a Jewish schoolboy in a Christian school the more intolerable. The insults which Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming resented, the one with cold guile and the other with furious passion, were the insults under which Benjamin Disraeli writhed impotently until he had acquired the skill—he never seems to have wanted the pluck—to avenge them with effect.

The boy was a bad learner but an insatiable student; he hated the drudgery of the form, but was never happier than when turning over the books in his father's library. "I read every book that I could get hold of," he says in his assumed character, "and studied as little as possible in my instructor's museum of verbiage, whether his specimens appeared in the anatomy of a substantive, or the still more disgusting form of a dissected verb." Viewing education, as he found it, as "the vile art of teaching words," he was naturally not a satisfactory pupil. He left school at between sixteen and seventeen, without reaching the senior class; yet that he had read widely, if not deeply, of the classics is

certain, though his own account of his adventures in ancient literature is scarcely credible. He claims to have been familiar, "in whole or part," with the works of Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Euripides, Sophocles, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Theocritus, Cicero, Caesar, Tacitus, Lucian, Lucretius, Terence, Livy, Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, and Catullus. On the one hand there can only be wonder at the moderation which omitted from the list Plato, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Cornelius Nepos, Ovid, and Plautus; on the other there is ground for some surprise that in after-life the possessor of so much learning showed little of the classical culture which distinguished his chief contemporaries in Parliament. The truth is, no doubt, that the youth pecked sparrow-like at anything that came his way; if an author interested him, and were not too difficult for a very moderate technical acquirement, backed by a quick mind and vivid imagination, he went on; if an author seemed dull, or were otherwise too heavy metal, he was read only "in part." At the same time, Dr. Cogan's school was unquestionably a good one, and Froude's sneer that the boys "could not have been distinguished for birth or good breeding" is patently unjust. No doubt little blue blood went the way of Walthamstow, but most of the pupils seem to have been the sons of professional men, and many of them became themselves distinguished in walks of life which fail to attract the vulgar.

Though he entered this establishment late and left it early—he was over thirteen before he had exhausted the uses of Mr. Poticary—it was to Dr. Cogan that Disraeli was indebted for the greater part of his formal education. There is little evidence for the tradition that he spent some time at a school at Winchester. Years later, at a speech day at Shrewsbury, when he and a Mr. Tomline were standing as Tory candidates for the borough, the health of the latter was proposed as "a gentleman educated at Eton," and, according to a local journal, "the health of Mr. Disraeli was next given in connection with Winchester School, where he

had been educated." It is not very material whether, as some allege, Disraeli was at some time or another under a tutor in the Hampshire county town. It is certain he was never connected with the only school his audience would have understood as "Winchester." It is equally certain, unless we assume a singular degree of malice and invention on the part of the local reporter, that he was not unwilling that his audience should think of him as a former pupil of one of the most famous schools in England. No doubt the announcement was the mistake of another, in which he merely acquiesced. Disraeli was no more incapable of telling an untruth than of profiting by an untruth already told. But no man of mature years, certainly no man as clever as he, would give birth to a lie so easy of detection. But, the statement having been made, he saw no reason to undeceive the company, and he forgot the presence of the reporter. He could have had no premonition of what in the day of his fame would be made of this small incident. The business is eloquent rather of incaution than of immorality; and stones have been thrown by people who have no missile to hurl against the invented pedigrees and disingenuous incompleteness of fact which swarm in Burke and Debrett.

For the rest, the question of Disraeli's schools is of small interest. His master at Walthamstow is said to have complained that he never understood the subjunctive. But he understood many things much more important, and all that was really important he taught himself. A much more essential fact than any relating to his schooling was his baptism, at the age of twelve years and seven months, as a member of the Church of England. On the eighth day of his life he had been "initiated into the Covenant of Abraham," and therefore grew up a nominal as well as an actual Jew. His father, after the dispute with the synagogue, formed no new religious attachment, and saw no necessity for his children to make any formal change of profession. Isaac's Gentile friends, however, represented the advantages, from a civil point of view, of baptism. Samuel

Rogers, the poet-banker, was among the insistent advocates of a course which would relieve the young people of the disabilities under which the unbaptised Jew still laboured—disabilities which, of course, would have closed public life to the future Prime Minister until long after all chance of success had passed. That Rogers, a man of notoriously loose life, employed any but material arguments is unlikely; and to Isaac, as to his friend, baptism would appear a mere formality.

Benjamin was christened on July 31, 1817, shortly after the death of his grandfather. The ceremony took place at St. Andrews, Holborn. One of the sponsors was Sharon Turner, the Anglo-Saxon scholar; the other was a Mrs. Ellis, the wife of a literary critic. This good woman seems to have had a real if intermittent influence over the lad for some years. In one of his boyish memoranda appears the following resolution:

To be always sincere and open with Mrs. E. Never to say but what I mean—*point de moquerie*, in which I think I excel.¹

Mrs. Ellis merits the gratitude of all good Disraelians for the part she took in making possible an Earl of Beaconsfield, though it must be admitted that, in spite of her efforts, her godchild remained a mocker to the end.

Isaac Disraeli had some idea of sending Benjamin to one of the universities, but this, like the public school project, was abandoned. The young man himself seems to have been for immediate experience of the world, as likely to teach him more than could be learned in the study of books. His earlier novels teem with contempt of academic ambition. "They spoke sometimes of great men," says Contarini Fleming of his tutors, "but their great men were always commentators. They sometimes burst into an eulogium of a great work; you might be sure it was ever a huge bunch of annotations. An unrivalled exploit turned out to be a happy conjecture; a marvellous deed was the lion's skin that covered the ears of a new reading. I was confounded to

¹ Quoted by Monypenny. He fails, however, to identify Mrs. E. with Mrs. Ellis.

hear the same epithets applied to their obscure demigods that I associated with the names of Caesar, and Socrates, and Pericles, and Cicero. It was perplexing to find that Pharsalia or a Philippic, the groves of Academus or the fanes of the Acropolis, could receive no higher admiration than was lavished upon the unknown exploits of a hunter after syllables." In *Vivian Grey* some youthful politician who had decided to spend three years at a university is spoken of as displaying "courage." Youth to Disraeli, in short, was the time for great original deeds, and not for second-hand thoughts. He had ambitions which might be wild, but were definite. The first was to attain political power, for, like Fakredeen in *Tancred*, he "felt born with a predisposition to rule." There were moods, no doubt, in which he yearned for immortal fame as a writer, times when, like some of his heroes, he felt himself craving to create, and esteemed nothing so glorious as the poet's power of giving shape to things not seen. But such dreams, though they returned from time to time, were not allowed to dominate. In *Contarini Fleming* we find the case put as, no doubt, it was often argued in his own mind :

What were all those great poets of whom we talk so much? What were they in their life-time? The most miserable of their species. Depressed, doubtful, obscure, or involved in petty quarrels and petty persecutions; often unappreciated, utterly uninfluential, beggars, flatterers of men unworthy even of their recognition; what a train of disgusting circumstances is the life of a great poet! A man of great energies aspires that they should be felt in his life-time, that his existence shall be rendered more intensely vital by the constant consciousness of his multiplied and multiplying power. Is posthumous fame a substitute for all this?

As with art, so with other things. The end was not to express but to impress himself. By such a book as *Vivian Grey* he could challenge the world's attention. By such a book as *The Young Duke* he could earn a much-needed cheque. By such a book as *Alroy* he could unburden his mind of his wilder thoughts, as some

men rid themselves of their wilder passions, and feel his head the clearer for business when the thing was done. But if he cared little about art for art's sake, he cared even less about money for money's sake. When he gambled in Mexican mines, it was not that he wanted to be rich, but that he wanted "rascal counters" for the greater game. Everything in the Disraelian philosophy is a means to the one important end, which is to be a big sort of man, if not in this way, then in that. One must ride well, not that there is so much in riding, but because everybody who is anybody knows how to ride. One must be able to box, because one may have some day to chastise an impertinent person one cannot call out. One must know how to use a small-sword and a pistol, because an affair of honour cannot be refused. One must dance, because "without dancing you can never attain a perfectly graceful carriage, which is of the highest importance in life." One must talk to women as much as one can, because that is "the best school," and the easiest way to gain fluency, because "you need not care what you say, and had better not be sensible."

All these precepts of a very aged and shrewd Polonius Disraeli were charactered by a very young and ardent Laertes Disraeli. He cultivated gallantry with the calculation, though not with the baseness, of John Churchill. He watched himself critically, with sympathy but also without illusion, as if he had been a third party. "The nervous rapidity of my first rattle soon subsided into a continuous flow of easy nonsense. Impertinent and flippant, I was universally hailed an original and a wit. At the age of fifteen I had unexpectedly become one of the most affected, conceited, and intolerable atoms that ever peopled the sunbeam of society." It is Contarini who speaks, but Benjamin was his twin brother. The handsome boy, with his ringlets and marvellous waistcoats, was anxious to catch the eyes of women, and ready to take the nearest means of doing so, but not because he was a natural puppy or because he attached much value to

gallantries as an end in themselves, for, a philanderer at fifteen, he did not become a lover till the thirties. "The worthiest objects of the chase are women and power. After I married Mary Anne I desisted from the one and devoted my life to the pursuit of the other." Thus Disraeli, grown middle-aged, who could afford to give precedence to women; the younger Disraeli would have placed power first, and indeed regarded women chiefly as the readiest means of getting power. He realised as justly as Napoleon, and at a much earlier age, the importance of women in affairs. No doubt he was fully aware also how far less are women than men influenced by racial prejudice. Florid as was the age, he overdressed the part of the Georgian dandy to a degree that incensed males. He carried rings too many in number and too brilliant in sparkle; his locks were too long and too heavily oiled; the slant of his tie was too insolently careless; the pattern of his waistcoat was over-gorgeous. But in the dress of a Methodist he would have still been unmistakably the Jew; and the insolent English youth would still have sneered. It was policy, therefore, to exaggerate. For if the men cursed his dandified absurdities, they made the women in any company give him a second look; to look a second time was to note that he had wonderful eyes, and was as handsome in one way as Byron in another, and by then the Disraelian tongue, potent as the serpent's with Eve, had begun its work.

But we are anticipating a little. Benjamin Disraeli, articled at seventeen to a firm of solicitors in Old Jewry, had little time between that age and his twentieth year to cultivate his naturally great social gifts. It is queer to think of him in the dull City office, with copying-presses and "law calf" round him, taking down letters from dictation, and making at least a show of zeal—his head meanwhile full of strange fancies and fierce ambitions. As yet he went little into general society, and we can guess from *Endymion* how weary he felt of the dismal London of those days; but of literary men he saw something, and at the table of Murray the

publisher he heard Tom Moore, whom he found "very entertaining," discuss French wines and the growing stoutness of Byron. The acquaintance with Murray, formed through his father, was to have its results. There was a vague notion of his going to the Bar in due course; but, while seeming to acquiesce as a dutiful son, Benjamin had quite other ideas. "Law and bad jokes till we are forty, and then, with the most brilliant success, the prospect of gout and a coronet," expressed his view of the profession on which the paternal heart was set; and when some sympathetic woman whispered that he had a genius above the office-stool his connection with Messrs. Swain, Stevens and Maples was as good as ended. During the three years of drudgery he dropped the apostrophe which his grandfather had assumed with the particle, and began to sign himself Disraeli instead of D'Israeli. He had grown to dislike the "foreign" look of the latter form.

It was a delicacy of health which procured for him an easy though gradual release from his legal bondage. The law was not definitely given up, but interruption followed interruption, and Benjamin ceased to be a clerk almost as insensibly as the mediæval peasant ceased to be a serf. His father's decision to leave London and settle at Bradenham, near High Wycombe, made the break definite. The medical faculty no doubt has its technical explanation of the fits of giddiness which afflicted the young clerk. A lay imagination may, however, hazard the guess that, tied to a distasteful job, he had worn himself out by his impatience to get rid of it in one way or another. His indisposition was at least well timed. Coinciding with a wish on his father's part for a change of scene, it resulted in a Continental tour through Belgium and up the Rhine. Benjamin's diaries and his letters to his sister show him to have been a glutton for sensations, and skilful in describing them. In the Low Countries he sated himself with pictures and cathedrals, and it is interesting to note that the fine swagger of Rubens seemed in particular to rouse his admiration. In Germany he

gave himself up to the delights of music. Everywhere he revelled in good wine and good food, quite in the manner of George Augustus Frederick in *The Young Duke*:

A pink *carte* succeeded to the satin playbill. Vitellius might have been pleased with the banquet. Ah, how shall we describe those soups, which surely must have been the magical elixir! How paint those ortolans dressed by the inimitable artist, *à la St. James*, for the occasion, and which look so beautiful in death that they must surely have preferred such an euthanasia even to flying in the perfumed air of an Ausonian Heaven!

Isaac Disraeli, who showed a well-developed thrift in the matter of letter postage, appears to have grudged little on the pleasures of the table. Benjamin no doubt looked on those gastronomic adventures as a part of his education. The *pâté de grenouilles* at Brussels was not only something to enjoy; it was something to be able to talk about. As George Brandes says in his study of Disraeli, "a man of the world does not only eat, he knows how to eat, and can not only drink, but make an impression by giving advice about the treatment of a Johannesburg or a Maraschino." There was method in this as in all other of the youthful Benjamin's testings and tastings. "In the ancient kingdom of England," Disraeli wrote in *Vivian Grey*, "it hath ever been the custom to dine previously to transacting business," and he added that but for the dinners it would be impossible to transact the business. It was a trifling observation, but trifles are illuminating. Did not Vivian Grey teach the Marquess of Carabas how to mull Moselle, and promise him the recipe for tomahawk punch? To the Marquess and his guests the dining and wining were merely customary, and therefore worth little thought. Oriental hospitality is of another kind. Even when it is not puffed up it expecteth something.

CHAPTER II

MEN often realise their first dreams; they seldom carry out their first plans. Given long life and a degree of capacity, he who desires intensely power, wealth, learning, or saintliness will not fail to be reasonably powerful, rich, learned, or pious. But a man may gain nothing by the cunning of his dispositions in the field of tobacco, in regard to which he had deep theories, and grow rich simply because the missing of a train, or a slip over a banana skin, introduced him to the unsuspected possibilities of soap. A Lord Chancellor often reaches the Woolsack mainly because he mismanaged his first criminal brief. The control of a Cabinet frequently falls to one who, lacking the industry or talent to make a first-class departmental chief, finds it easier to manage many men than one thing. Clive and Rhodes both had the kind of mind which passionately demands large expression in terms of power and money. But Clive's first plan was the pretty hopeless one of getting himself shipped to the Indies on starvation wages, and Rhodes's idea of going to the Cape was to save himself from consumption.

Disraeli seems to have realised at a very early age that a dream, conceded a certain quality in the dreamer, is more important than a plan. There is something very curious in the decision with which he put aside the industrious apprentice theory of life. After the solicitor's clerk episode had closed, we find no trace of a desire for any of the regulation careers. True, he oscillated long between the attractions of politics and of literature, but there was no third charmer. When we consider the nature of the times his confidence in the possibilities of either career might seem fatuous

enough. Even to-day the young man who contemplates living by politics or letters is embarking on a fearsome gamble. Still, there are parliamentary salaries and pickings ; there are countless newspapers, and not a few chances of a seat. It is always possible to live by journalism, if the public refuses to buy one's books : and if one happens to be both a journalist and a Member of Parliament one finds a better market. But in the England of Disraeli's early days, still in the grip of the proud caste which had governed it since the Hanoverian succession, there was but one resource for penniless political ambition. Due cleverness might tempt a wealthy patron to offer a pocket borough to the aspirant who amused or impressed him. Such a back door availed Gladstone. But Disraeli's case was very different from Gladstone's. He came of an alien race. His father's fortune was small, his circle uninfluential. He lacked the prestige of any good school or college. Superficially there could be no more hopeless ambition than that of forcing himself into the House of Commons, until he had made name and fortune elsewhere ; and literature, while it might give him some sort of name, offered no hope of fortune. Disraeli, however, recognising that he could not succeed by system, felt that he might triumph by chance, and seems deliberately to have preferred the philosophy of the gambler to that of the plodder.

We have enumerated his disadvantages ; what were his assets ? Clearly he himself reckoned among them what most would consider a deficiency, his imperfect schooling. He might admit that, socially, it was a handicap to have missed Eton and Oxford ; spiritually, he conceived, it was an enormous advantage. Was not Cleveland Vivian Grey's inferior because, being a highly educated man, he was at thirty-three "as ignorant of the workings of the human heart as when, in the innocence of boyhood, he first reached Eton ?" Public schools and universities no doubt counted for much in England. But in no country did scholarship count for less, and it was something to have escaped

the scholarship. As an experienced old man, his opinion on this point seems to have remained that of his impatient youth, for in *Lothair* we find him make one of his characters say to a young English aristocrat :

What you call your ignorance is your strength. By ignorance you mean a want of knowledge of books. Books are fatal ; they are the curse of the human race. . . What I admire in the order to which you belong is that they do live in the air, that they excel in athletic sports ; that they only speak one language ; and that they never read. This is not a complete education ; but it is the highest education since the Greek.

Other deficiencies young Disraeli felt more keenly. "Curse on my lot," said Vivian Grey, "that the want of a few rascal counters and the possession of a little rascal blood should mar my fortune !" This inadequacy of rascal counters was indeed the young gambler's worst trouble, and it survived all the others. Money for ordinary wants seems always to have been within his reach, but his wants were never ordinary. At the game he was playing the very price of admission to the tables was a stake in itself, and his luck at the tables was consistently bad. He gambled on the Stock Exchange and lost. He played high at cards and lost. The moneylender was soon to be a familiar demon—to be faced gallantly, like all other enemies, but not, for many a long year, to be exorcised. On the question of blood he had at least satisfied himself, and that was half the battle. Aristocracy, what was it ? All the authentic aristocracy of England had perished in the Wars of the Roses ; could it be that he, the descendant of Arragonese nobles, was inferior to the progeny of monastery-pillagers, bastards, nabobs, borough-mongers, and forestallers, who composed three-quarters of the peerage ? He summoned up a pride of race to confront the pride of caste. "To govern men," he said a very few years later, "you must either excel them or despise them." He proposed in the long run to excel ; in the meantime he heartened himself by despising.

His first foreign trip may be taken as a departure point. It marks the conclusion of his nonage. Hitherto he had been a boy, though a most extraordinary one. We are henceforth conscious of something bigger ; the curious, craving, dreaming youth had become, in however rudimentary a form, the active, managing, contriving man of affairs. Disraeli's first adventure on his return from the Continent was in itself a disastrous failure, but it provided him with an invaluable basis of experience for his future manœuvres. He had used his pen, unscrupulously enough, in the interests of some Latin-American financial schemes into which he had put, with no happy results, his own or (most probably) borrowed money. These pamphlets, not literature but abounding in literary touches, caught the eye of Murray the publisher, who was ready enough to put work into the hands of the son of an old friend. He commissioned Benjamin to write a life of Paul Jones ; and the intimacy which grew between author and publisher was used just as Vivian Grey used his chance meeting with the Marquess of Carabas. Murray had fancied a monthly review in the Tory interest, but had been forestalled by Blackwood. The notion, however, still interested him ; it was a subject of discussion with his young assistant, and under the influence of Disraeli a vastly more ambitious scheme began to take shape. Murray was to find half the capital for a daily newspaper ; the other half was to be provided by a Mr. Powles and by Disraeli himself. The latter, of course, was no capitalist, but he apparently trusted his luck to get somebody to back him at the right moment.

For a time all went well. Murray was the real-life Carabas ; and just as Vivian Grey fared to Wales to secure Cleveland as leader of the new party, so did Disraeli fare to Scotland to secure Lockhart as editor of the new journal. But the guile of the tempter had not the same immediate and complete success in real life as in the book. Lockhart and Sir Walter Scott, his father-in-law, refused to be charmed. Disraeli, whose

ringlets and waistcoats must indeed have astounded Edinburgh, was pronounced a "coxcomb," and Lockhart declared it beneath his dignity to become a newspaper editor. The flexible emissary at once varied his ground, and, in stooping, conquered. As a gentleman, Lockhart would not condescend to edit the paper, but he did condescend to accept the salary and carry out most of the duties of an editor. With this agreement Disraeli returned triumphantly to London; and, though Wilson Croker, the Secretary to the Admiralty, intrigued against the new periodical—a proceeding for which Disraeli took ample revenge when he wrote *Coningsby*, where Croker is mercilessly satirised as Mr. Rigby—Disraeli got his way. *The Representative* was started, enjoyed a brief and inglorious career, and cost its proprietor a small fortune. Disraeli gained nothing. A City panic destroyed his chance of finding the capital he had engaged to put into the enterprise, and Murray, angry with the failure of the venture, shelved him as peremptorily as Carabas dismissed Vivian.

It was a bitter disappointment, and does much to explain the tone of *Vivian Grey*, the first part of which saw the light a few months later, when Disraeli was still in his twenty-second year. This remarkable first novel was produced under the inspiration and advice of a woman. Among Isaac Disraeli's friends was a Mr. Austen, a solicitor who occasionally acted the part of literary agent. Mrs. Austen, handsome, talented, highly susceptible to flattery, had looked on the young Jew and found him to her liking. Her influence is to be traced in *Vivian Grey*, which undoubtedly she found a savage satire, and softened into something the drawing-rooms would tolerate. Disraeli, in the pang of recent discomfiture, was no doubt anxious to make society smart for his mortification, but female tact and sagacity sufficed to leaven this ill-humour with enough amenity to save the novel from being a mere lampoon. *Vivian Grey* is a bitter book, but it is also a book of curious reticences: and the careful reader has no

difficulty in discovering where a particularly scandalous passage has been deleted. In later life the author apologised for the novel, and even went so far as to profess that it gave a picture of manners which had no better basis than a boyish imagination. His task would have been harder but for the alterations and omissions urged on him by Mrs. Austen. Her services, in fact, were greater than either can have guessed at the time: and Queen Victoria's favourite Minister must have been profoundly thankful, for example, that Mrs. Felix Lorraine left Vivian so suddenly at the little gate leading to her apartments. The printed chapter ends with the words, "She disappeared." It would be interesting to know how the original manuscript continued.

If any other proof were needed of Mrs. Austen's devotion for the young author it would be found in the fact that she copied the whole book in her own hand in order to preserve secrecy as to the writer's identity—a point to which Disraeli attached capital importance. He loved mystery for its own sake; there was always a corner of his mind devoted to cabala; during the Lockhart negotiations he had used a code fitted for an affair of high treason, and to the end of his life he revealed a weakness for attributing all the great events of history to the influence of secret societies. But this racial idiosyncrasy was reinforced by a highly practical motive. A picture of society acknowledged on publication as the work of a young Jew of no social position could only earn derision, whatever its merits, and the greater its audacity the greater the contempt. But a clever anonymous book, interpreted as a *roman à clef*, would get even more than its deserts in the matter of discussion and speculation. In its incurable disbelief in the power of inexperienced genius, society would insist that the author must needs be familiar with the circles he described; there would be a Junius mystery on a small scale; this or that celebrity would be indicated as alone possessing the necessary knowledge, malice, and literary art. The scheme worked

to admiration. Ingeniously puffed in advance, the book ran into three editions. Then, when everybody was talking about it, and the revelation was too late to damage, the secret was revealed. Disraeli, like Byron, became famous in a day.

But the fame was of a rather dangerous kind. In later years the author regretted the book as an indiscretion, on the ground that it dealt too tartly with the world of fashion and politics. That, however, was not the real trouble. In many a later novel Disraeli was no kinder to the great, but never again was he so cruel to himself. In *Vivian Grey* he had been so indiscreet as to draw a recognisable portrait of himself as an entirely unscrupulous schemer, with a view of things in general incompatible with the standards and traditions of the English gentlemanly caste. That was the mistake of *Vivian Grey*, and it was not repeated. *Coningsby*, published eighteen years later, is in many ways even more audacious. But its hero, from Eton onwards, is beyond reproach.

For the time being, however, the novel served its purpose. Nobody could for some space forget the author, and he himself, with rehabilitated self-esteem, could shake himself free from the disappointment of *The Representative* failure. *Vivian Grey* is a most uneven book. The first part, constructed from experience, is brilliant; the second, supported only by imagination, is forcibly feeble; and this mixture of genius and vehement inadequacy, in varying degrees, is constant in every novel Disraeli wrote. The things he knows and can feel he does well; but there are some things he does not know, and more that he cannot feel. It is true that the young lawyer's clerk had not, at twenty-one, mixed with the people he described most successfully. But while at work for Murray he had gained some real knowledge of the political comedy, and there can be no doubt that Murray himself served as the model for the Marquess of Carabas. The character has too much vitality not to have been sketched from the life. Completely without reverence for the British

aristocracy, Disraeli guessed that there was not much difference between the great nobleman he had never seen and the great bookseller whom he had seen through and through. The bold shots rarely missed their mark. Vivian cajoling the Marquess with a mixture of impudence and adulation is a thoroughly convincing figure ; the Marquess being cajoled is equally rich. With Murray, at once timorous and racked with ambition, Disraeli had no doubt played in much the same way.

The novel has a double interest as a record and a forecast. It narrates the first abortive essay in self-promotion. It indicates the general nature of the means by which success was ultimately achieved. Two quotations should be remembered by all who would read aright the story of Disraeli's fortunes and victories :

Vivian's morning was amply occupied in maturing with the Marquess the grand principles of the new political system ; in weighing interests, in balancing connections, and settling what side was to be taken on the great questions ? O politics, thou splendid juggle ! The whole business, although so magnificent in its results, appeared very easy to the two counsellors, for it was one of the first principles of Mr. Vivian Grey that everything was possible. . . Not that it must be supposed, even for a moment, that Vivian Grey was what the world calls conceited. Oh, no ! he knew the measure of his own mind, and had fathomed the depths of his own powers with equal skill and impartiality ; but in the process he could not but feel that he could conceive much, and dare do more.

The second quotation is from a discourse by the cynical and disillusioned Cleveland :

Of all the delusions which flourish in this mad world the delusion of that man is the most frantic who voluntarily, and of his own accord, supports the interests of a party. . . Never, for a moment, suppose that you can accomplish your objects by coming forward, unsolicited, to fight the battle of a party. . . No, Grey, make them fear you, and they will kiss your feet. There is no act of treachery, of meanness, of which a political party is not capable ; for in politics there is no honour.

To Disraeli, as to Vivian, politics were in the main a splendid juggle. No man saw more clearly the merits

of the "great questions." None could discourse on them with more penetration, but none was less disposed to tread unprofitably the lonely path of the prophet too wise for his time. Disraeli, like Cleveland, was himself no unfavourable specimen of the politician, but he discerned from the beginning that there were in those days for the man of humble birth and no money but two paths to success in public—the one the path of small treacheries and meannesses, the other the path of the bold blackmailer. He could not himself be a Tadpole, a Taper, or a Rigby: and he seems to have held it cleaner, as well as more splendid, to rise by a large disregard of scruples. Nearly always he remained true to himself; he was a staunch colleague and a kindly patron; he had principles in a degree few of his contemporaries could equal, if we define principles in terms of intellectual conviction; but for party as party he kept to his dying day the contempt he felt for it at twenty. To English statesmen, Tory or Liberal, party was as much a necessity as deity; if it had not existed it would have had to be invented. To Disraeli it was but an accident, and not wholly a fortunate one.

The year of strain which had seen the failure of the newspaper scheme and the success of the novel was too much for the young man's strength. To set himself up he took another tour on the Continent, this time in the company of the Austens. He talked with Byron's boatman on the Lake of Geneva, visited the picture galleries of Verona, Venice, and Florence; and sought by every distraction to restore tone to mind and body. But the singular malady did not pass. Its effect is to be seen in the tameness of the second part of *Vivian Grey*. He had no longer his own experiences to draw upon, and the imaginative effort required to give even a relative degree of life to the later episodes was beyond him in his enfeebled condition.

It was largely for his sake that Isaac Disraeli left

London for Buckinghamshire, hoping that in the old manor-house of Bradenham, out of reach of the "hourly seductions" of the capital, refreshment and healing would come. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from such a phrase that Disraeli was already a great literary lion. His circle of acquaintance had enlarged; he enjoyed a certain notoriety; but it was as yet quite uncertain whether he would not share the fate of many other men of one book. Probably a good deal of his mental trouble was simply due to the agony of doubt. An instantaneous success, especially one of this particular kind, is not an unmixed advantage to an author. He has not yet reached the point of judging himself with an impersonal coolness. A word of high praise tempts him to believe himself a genius; a scrap of malicious criticism gives him the sensations of a detected impostor. He is tormented equally by irrational hopes and exaggerated fears. If he can better the expectations founded on his first effort then, surely, there is permanent fame and fortune for him; if he fails, then, as Mr. Micawber would say, "the God of day has gone down on the cheerless scene." Youth always tends to this simplification: a small misfortune is a final tragedy, a small triumph is of immeasurable importance. No man thus tortured has full possession of his powers; the very persuasion that he must show himself more and more sparkling renders him artificial and over-strained, and the despair which comes of occasional candid self-examination is the most sterilising of all moods. One may trace the sufferings of young Disraeli in his early novels. Contarini Fleming, after a rapture of creative energy, reads over what he has written, and finds it crude, silly, "absolutely sickening." "The springiness of my mind is gone," cries Vivian Grey in an hour of depression. His creator was in like plight. In *Popanilla*, published in 1828, we find a determination to be brilliant, combined with a lack of vigour, that indicates eloquently the state of mind of the author. Incomprehensibly placed by some on a level with the *Tale of a Tub* and

Candide, it is generally described as a satire on Benthamism, but there are in fact few features of the English life of his time to which the author does not apply the distorting mirror of ridicule. But though it has gleams of humour there is a lack of spontaneity about the whole thing ; and despite Froude's dictum that "matter, style, and manner are equally admirable," a strong sense of duty is required at this time to read it. A dull satire is of all dull things the dullest. However, John Bright seems to have admired *Popanilla*.

The chief interest of this, as well as of two other light works in a similar vein but in a somewhat happier mood, *Ixion in Heaven* and *The Infernal Marriage*, is that they further reveal the contempt Disraeli felt thus early for the party system, and show that his Toryism had much in common (as true Toryism always has) with the more honest and perceptive kind of Radicalism. He is not to be persuaded of the virtue of legal fictions, whether they take the form of a John Doe or of a Georgius Rex. He is not to be assured of the safety or permanence of a society in which wealth is divorced from duty and toil from dignity. He is wholly sceptical of the industrial millennium which manufactured mobs of paper millionaires, and of the prosperity which caused the single city of Hubbabub to cover two-thirds of the island of Vraibleusia. And he has nothing but a bitter laugh for the policy which made his Blunderland, like the real Ireland, a place of savagery.

Here we have something of the real Disraeli, a little bewildered and depressed. There is scarcely a trace of the real Disraeli in *The Young Duke*, written to earn the cheque of a publisher who demanded a novel of high life. It was hardly dealt with even in its own day, as suited to the tastes of "parasites, sycophants, toad-eaters, tuft-hunters, and humble companions"; its author quite evidently wearied of it before he had finished ; during the greater part of the task his tongue seldom left his cheek ; and it was not by his own wish that it survived to take a place in his collected works.

Its atmosphere is voluptuous, but rarely erotic: the perfunctory treatment of the love-making contrasts with the gusto with which good eating is discussed. Disraeli, like Cardinal Wiseman, had a lobster-salad side to his nature, and enjoyed a rhapsody on food almost as much as a feast itself. Here and there are a few interesting political reflections. Peel is mentioned as "the model of a Minister"; Burdett as "the most commanding speaker I ever listened to"; Hobhouse as "ill qualified for a demagogue"; Brougham as one in whom "the lawyer has spoiled the statesman." Here, too, is to be found the suggestion that a speaker in the Commons might found his style on *Don Juan*, but that in the Lords *Paradise Lost* must be his model. When touching on Catholic emancipation Disraeli shows the tenderness for the Roman Church which he was to develop in the Young England novels, but which he suppressed sternly at a still later period. Wandering Americans seem to have accepted *The Young Duke* as a serious picture of English life; but old Isaac's "What does Ben know about Dukes?" had point. Not yet had he seen the great world except from afar, and the guesswork which sufficed to give spice and verisimilitude to a satire was unable to impart life to what was intended as a sympathetic study. The date, 1830, is noteworthy. The Reform Bill agitation was gathering strength, and the panegyric on aristocracy may have had objects beyond the satisfaction of a publisher's desire to attract the middle-class snob. But if young Disraeli were ready to let the Tory magnates know that the support of a very clever young gentleman was to be had on reasonable terms, he was careful not to commit himself to either party:

Am I a Whig or a Tory? I forget. As for the Tories, I admire antiquity, particularly a ruin; even the relics of the Temple of Intolerance have a charm. I think I am a Tory. But then the Whigs give such good dinners, and are the most amusing. I think I am a Whig; but then the Tories are so moral, and morality is my forte. I must be a Tory. But the Whigs dress so much better, and an ill-dressed party, like an ill-dressed man,

must be wrong. Yes, I am a decided Whig. And yet—I feel like Garrick between tragedy and comedy. I think I will be a Whig and Tory alternate nights.

This levity will be sought in vain in any edition of *The Young Duke* later than 1853; the position of the author demanded its suppression. Blue-pencilled also was a passage beginning:

Oh, England! Oh, my country! although many an Eastern clime and southern race have given me something of their burning blood, it flows for thee!

The mature Disraeli no doubt considered that this young gentleman was protesting too much.

Leaving *The Young Duke* to the care of Colburn, who had so successfully puffed *Vivian Grey*, Benjamin left England on a foreign tour, the most ambitious he had yet undertaken, and destined to have important consequences. He was accompanied by a Mr. Meredith, a young man of fortune betrothed to his sister Sara. "Adventures are to the adventurous," says Sidonia: and Sidonia's creator, according to his lively accounts of the journey, had a knack of talking and getting talked about wherever he penetrated. At Gibraltar his studs and waistcoats, his morning and evening cane, are reported by himself to be "the admiration and envy of many subalterns"; and he lectured the Governor, "a fine old gentleman of the Windsor Terrace school," on politics and morals. In Spain he indulged in meditations over his noble ancestors, cheered at bull-fights, was mistaken by an old woman for a "returned Saracen," spent a week in the society of brigands, snubbed the Governor of Cadiz, a "singular brute," making him "stare for half an hour in a most extraordinary manner," and revelled in Saracenic architecture. The Alhambra called forth all the latent Oriental in him; the memory of it made him dismiss the Ducal Palace at Venice as "barbarous," but so confused was he by his enthusiasm that he talked of that building in terms of the Parthenon, the Pantheon,

and York Minster. At Malta, where his social success was, according to his own account, "complete and unrivalled," but where, according to other information, the officers of the garrison pronounced him "a damned bumptious Jew boy," he fell in with a rich London acquaintance, James Clay, who took him eastward in his yacht.

For a moment we find him "resolved" to join the Turkish army then fighting in Albania. The fancy of becoming an inverted Byron passed, but not the sympathy for the Moslem, an inheritance from his ancestors, that now stirred within him. Passing Navarino, where a few years before the Sultan's fleet had been destroyed, he was moved to lament "Codrington's bloody blunder." At Yanina he felt a thrill when congratulating the great man who had "pacified" Albania by decapitating great numbers of its inhabitants. At Athens he could think only of the Greek as the copyist of the Persian and the Arab, and the instructress and model of the "flat-nosed Franks." Constantinople produced an excitement he had thought dead. He revelled in every detail of Turkish life. He made his first essay in smoking on a "voluptuous divan," holding between his lips the tube of a "superb" and monstrous pipe. He indulged daily in the luxury of a bath "requiring half-a-dozen attendants." He "courted the air" on a "cantering barb" or in a "carved caïque," and counted his tourist routine a "more sensible life than the bustle of clubs, the boring of drawing-rooms, and the coarse vulgarity of political controversies."

All this, however, was but the prelude to the real drama—the return to the land of his ancestors. There is a new note in the correspondence of which Palestine is the subject. His feelings are too deep for the jaunty tone of his Spanish and Turkish letters. The week in Jerusalem is the "most delightful" of his travels, but he speaks of it with a singular reserve. Sentiments which might have shocked the anglicised circle at Bradenham are left to be expressed through the

unembarrassing medium of fiction. *Alroy* represents, perhaps more than any of the novels, that strange, wild, poetical thing that was the true soul of Benjamin Disraeli. *Alroy* has been made the subject of much critical scoffing, and the style may well be called mannered. A blend of Tom Moore and the Song of Solomon could not but be vulnerable. Yet, such as it is, *Alroy* has that distinction which is never wanting in a work of the imagination concerning a subject which rouses the deepest feelings of an exceedingly talented man. The hero of the tale, David Alroy, is an historical character idealised out of recognition. The original, though the characters are not always completely distinct, was one of those false Messiahs who so often appeared among the Jews during the Middle Ages, much more rogue than hero. Disraeli transfigures him into a warlike genius who, after nearly restoring the Royal House of Judah, with Bagdad as the centre of his kingdom, dies a martyr's death. "The Supernatural machinery of the romance," wrote Disraeli in 1845, "is Cabalistical and correct." But to many readers, Jewish as well as Gentile, the sceptre of Solomon, the celestial alphabet, and the rest of the mystical apparatus, are so much hocus-pocus. Nevertheless, *Alroy* is probably the most sincere of all Disraeli's works, and his declaration that it is the book which contains the record of his "ideal ambitions" must be credited.

Standing on the Mount of Olives, or entering Jerusalem by the Gate of Sion, the youthful cynic lost the mood of *Vivian Grey*, ceased momentarily to think of his career in British politics, no longer persuaded himself that he was the English patriot of *The Young Duke*. In his glorification of the lost splendour of Jewry there is no trace of the aloof irony with which he surveys the tale of European progress. There is the same generous and unselfish emotion which emerges for a moment in *Tancred* when he talks of the Feast of Tabernacles, and contrasts the social situation of the Jew of Houndsditch, born to hereditary insult, condemned to the meanest toil, living among filth and fogs,

with his racial memory of "a subject which has inspired poets and which has made gods: the harvest of the grape in the native regions of the vine." It is an emotion far purer and more worthy than the cynical pleasure with which, in *Coningsby*, he emphasises the power of the usurer which the despised Jew in his degradation exercised over the kings of the earth. It is the emotion of the Wandering Jew who yearns to wander no longer and wants to have a land as well as a race. But it may be marked that even at this high tide of his emotion Disraeli was not swept into fancying that the destiny of his people was to rule a little strip of territory between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, or that his mission was to restore the chosen people to the Holy Land. Even in Zion he was no Zionist. He was no more a Little Israelite than a Little Englander. The vision of Alroy was not a mere restoration of the throne of David. It was universal domination for the race of Abraham:

"Shall this quick blaze of Empire sink to a glimmering and a twilight sway over some petty province?" he cries in the hour of his victory. "The decent patriarch of a pastoral horde? Is the Lord of Hosts so light a God that we must place a barrier to his sovereignty. . . . Well, I am clearly summoned . . . and where's the priest shall dare impugn my faith because his altars smoke on other hills than those of Judah?"

On the eve of Disraeli's return to England in the summer of 1831 his friend Meredith died of small-pox at Cairo. He felt the loss keenly, and for his sister his grief was profound. Always a man of deep and strong natural affections, he was peculiarly happy in his family relations, but between him and his sister especially there was the most perfect understanding, and their correspondence, a mass of which has been preserved, reveals both in an exceedingly lovable aspect. Sara made Benjamin her idol, and after Meredith's death devoted herself entirely to his service, while he

on his side repaid her love with all the tenderness of which in private life he was supremely capable. His most charming tribute to her is the delicate sketch of David Alroy's love for his sister Miriam.

Back from the East, with his mind and nerve restored to tone, he set himself again to literary labours. He had written much while abroad, and soon after his return was able to send the manuscript of *Contarini Fleming* to Murray, with whom he was anxious to renew relations. Murray submitted it to Milman (afterwards Dean Milman, the editor of Gibbon), who thought it "very wild," but recommended it for publication as a *Childe Harold* in prose. It was unfortunate, however, in the opportunity of its appearance. In 1832 Great Britain was too concerned in politics to have much time to spare for romantic fiction, and the book was at first scarcely noticed. Heine, however, declared that English letters had given "no offspring equal to *Contarini Fleming*," and, regarded as autobiography in the gangue, it is at least as precious as *Vivian Grey*. Contarini, a child of the Mediterranean, grows sadly up in a northern country. One day a stranger puts into his hand a book in which are inscribed the words: "Nature is more powerful than education"; it is a history of his Venetian ancestors. Another day, he, brought up a Lutheran, enters a Roman Catholic chapel, and immediately becomes a convert. Between them his historical reading and his religious meditation fill him with a passionate longing "to break away from those links which chained me as a citizen to a country which I abhorred." Always before his eyes there gleams "the image of a distant and most romantic city."

Contarini is Disraeli in fancy dress. His visions of Venice are Disraeli's visions of Jerusalem; his surrender to the Mass represents Disraeli's craving for the Law. "Race," said the author elsewhere, "is the key to history." But for a while Contarini seeks to escape its influence. His father is all-powerful in the politics of his adopted country, and to the son, on reaching early manhood, "foreign policy opened a dazzling vista of

splendid incidents." At a diplomatic meeting, by sheer audacity, he wins a triumph for the State he serves without love. "My son," says his father, "you will be Prime Minister of ———, perhaps something greater." But Contarini's fall is as sudden as his rise. He is tempted to write a satire in which he too openly ridicules the powers that be, and this error destroys the chance of a career. Here, of course, is an apology for the indiscretions of *Vivian Grey*, addressed, no doubt, rather to Murray than to the political grandees, who cannot have taken it too seriously, or than to the public, which must have long forgotten even if it had been disinclined to forgive what, from its point of view, was scarcely an offence. Henceforward the novel becomes much of a guide-book. There is a most charming and entertaining account of Disraeli's travels in Spain, Italy, and the East; and in the end Contarini is left resolving to devote his life to the "creation of the beautiful."

Contarini Fleming reveals much of Disraeli as he was at the time he composed this "psychological romance." We see the stirring of the old blood, in contact with the mystery of Asia, if we substitute Palestine for the Italy of the text. We note the hesitation between political ambitions and the call of an artist's temperament. We find once again the faith in impudence as an ingredient in statesmanship. But, strong as is his impulse to lyrical self-confession, Disraeli has now realised, as he did not in *Vivian Grey*, that he must not give too much away. He must speak in allegory. "Bitter jest," he exclaims in the last chapter, "that the most civilised portion of the globe should be considered incapable of self-government!" Contarini purports here to be lamenting the enslavement of Italy; but the cause which was to win English sympathy never gained Disraeli's. Years later he championed the Austrian rule against Palmerston; and when he mourns over Venice and Naples he can only be understood to be weeping, with Rachel, over the oppressed children of Jewry. In *Alroy*, published in

1833, he was, as we have seen, bolder ; but it must be remarked that there appeared with this novel a short story entitled *The Rise of Iskander*. In this he seeks to make the balance equal by glorifying the Christian hero of Albania. No other purpose can be imagined. It is impossible to attribute sympathy with Christians struggling against the Moslem yoke to one who but a few months before had meditated becoming a volunteer in the Turkish army operating in Iskander's own country.

One other question must be considered. Did Disraeli ever "abhor" England as Contarini "abhorred" the Scandinavian land in which he passed his restless youth? Hostile critics have made much of the word. Admirers have carefully ignored it. An impartial judgment can hardly resist the conclusion that there were moments when Disraeli did hate England and the English. He was proud, brave, sensitive: and there was much in the England of the time to affront his pride, rouse his spirit, lacerate his feelings. He was fully a citizen only because he had abjured the faith of his fathers. He was the grandson of a Jewess who almost cursed her race for the humiliations and limitations to which its blood condemned her. He had suffered contumely and petty oppression at school. In society he was snubbed, and even those who admired his talents and admitted his accomplishments must often have hurt as much by their patronage as his enemies wounded by their disdain. The old Governor at Gibraltar no doubt showed a sniffing sort of courtesy, the officers at Malta talked of the bumptious Jew boy. Tortured with a devouring ambition, Disraeli must have had moments of doubt whether all his pluck, all his ability, all his skill in the arts that raise obscurity would suffice to overcome the prejudice against his race and his origins. A lad of genius in such a situation could hardly love England. It is enough that he forgave, if he did not forget.

CHAPTER III

SO far Disraeli had wavered between the literary and the political career. Everything now conspired to put a term of his hesitations.

His strength was restored. He had come to understand, partially at least, his limitations as a writer. His glimpse of the East, rousing in him a full sense of the part played by the Semitic race in world history, had inflamed the will to rule. Further, there were strong practical reasons for preferring the life of action. The intense preoccupation of the public with political affairs lessened the possibility of large reward, either in fame or in money, from letters. There had been revolutions in France, Saxony, and the Netherlands, and in Britain the fear of a violent overthrow of the old order was constantly expressed. Such conditions promised ill for the unestablished novelist ; they held high hope for the political adventurer. In the confusion of old standards and currencies the chances were greater than dull and decorous times could afford for one lacking birth, wealth, connection, and even the education of the dominant caste. Moreover, it happened that a vacancy was expected in the Parliamentary representation of High Wycombe, a miniature borough almost at the gate of Bradenham. To his friend Austen Disraeli confided that he intended to offer himself for the seat, and, spending most of the winter of 1831 at his father's house, he divided his time between finishing his novels and nursing the constituency.

The vacancy, however, did not come so soon as had been expected, and in the spring of 1832 he went to London. It was now that began that life of the salons which, according to some writers, he had led from his earliest manhood. He appears to have been received

rather as the friend of Bulwer than as the son of his father or the author of *Vivian Grey*. Through Bulwer he met not only many peers and peeresses, dandies, literary men, and blue-stockings, but, what was more to the purpose, a certain number of people influential in politics. Dining with Lord Eliot (afterwards Earl St. Germans) he found himself one evening next to Sir Robert Peel, who was "most gracious" and "unbent with becoming haughtiness." Disraeli replied with "dignified familiarity," the attitude he considered proper on the part of "a present Radical" towards a Tory ex-Minister. But most of the company he frequented was less serious, and though it may have been a couple of years later that he began to visit Lady Blessington, it was in the rooms of that queen of fashionable Bohemia that he completed his education in the ways of the polite world. There it was that he picked up an acquaintance with many distinguished and some disreputable people. Lady Blessington was a large-hearted potentate, and her charm, with the wit and talent of Count D'Orsay, made her house a kind of court at which the right of audience was the ability to be amusing. It was not a raffish society that met there, though it included raffish individuals. "Great ladies" might frown on the equivocal establishment, but their lords were for the most part less censorious, and there, as at a great modern gambling place or cure, it was possible to rub shoulders with the most substantial as well as with the most dubious of celebrities. It was there, no doubt, that Disraeli made his first advances to Lord Lyndhurst. There, probably, he met Louis Napoleon, whom, under the name of Prince Florestan, he was to describe in *Endymion* nearly half a century afterwards, and M. de Morny, later to become famous both as Minister of the Second Empire and a bravo of the Bourse, who may perhaps be identified with the Baron Sergius of the same novel.

Some of his new acquaintances were decidedly expensive. The brilliant crowd included many young men at their wits' end for money—some of them the spendthrift

sons of rich fathers, others mere adventurers anxious whence the next week's shot was to come. A Jew may not have money, but he is always suspected of being near it, and it was natural that Disraeli should listen to many tales of bills that must be renewed and of loans that must be raised. He had old friends in the City, and if he could not lend money himself he could put his friends in the way of getting it, on terms. Good-natured and optimistic, he was always ready to oblige a friend and ever hopeful that the indirect advantage of doing so would in the long run outweigh the inconvenience which sometimes followed. Thus he would back a bill, and if it were not met he would even borrow money to meet it himself. Froude vouches that he did so, though it is not easy to see what strictly commercial value his signature might have. But a Jew who is a usurer is still a Jew, and there were, no doubt, a hundred obscure reasons why so talented a fellow-Jew should be allowed a good long stretch of rope. It is certain that Disraeli was obliging from calculation as well as from good-nature. In *Vivian Grey* he had written in his haste that if one made friends of women in society the men could be slighted, but that was a boyish opinion. Experience had taught him that the male, too, must be propitiated, and what a compliment is to a pretty woman, that—and more also—is a signature to a dissipated man.

Froude suggests that except as providing lay figures for his literary work, the young men of the Blessington-D'Orsay set were to him of "a value less than zero." That surely is a judgment lacking in worldly wisdom. Rakes and spendthrifts do not all of them go to the dogs. Many of them emerge as highly respectable people with a stake in the country. Justice Shallow, a connoisseur in *bona robas* when he lay at Clement's Inn, ended up with land and bees; and many of the most lavish sowers of wild oats who thought young Disraeli a devilish good fellow for arranging matters with Mr. Moss or Mr. Ahrens became in course of time pillars of the Constitution. There are few things that bind like an early comradeship in joyous impecuniosity, and the

memory of ancient follies and ancient debts gave Disraeli in after years an intimate claim on the consideration of old fellow-Bohemians. Moreover, his variegated experience of life secured him, as a statesman, an advantage over colleagues and rivals who had been the industrious apprentices of politics. To live is to learn, and no one lives or learns who never quits respectability. A clever German-Jewish journalist, he who calls himself Maximilian Harden, once declared that the diplomatic superiority of King Edward VII over the Emperor William was due to the difference in the ways they had spent their salad days. The one had been intimate with many sorts of men and women, while the latter grew to maturity knowing human nature only as it is revealed in courts. At any rate Disraeli, who should be an excellent judge of his own life, never regretted the experiences of his youth, and from *Endymion* may be gathered his contempt in old age for Ministers whose sole knowledge of men had been gained in Downing Street or in decorous country houses.

While waiting for the Wycombe vacancy he made a definite entry into the political world with a pamphlet published under the title of *Gallomania*. Ten years later he was to be advocate of a close alliance with France, and the general character of his foreign policy was extremely friendly to the French. But it was now necessary to attack the Whigs, since at High Wycombe he would need the support of both Radicals and Conservatives. On the dominant question of reform he was obliged to sit on the fence, for fear of offending either of the schools to which he looked for votes. On foreign policy, however, he could not only speak freely but indulge in useful hysteria. Nine hundred and ninety-nine Englishmen in a thousand held the general notion that Frenchmen were un-English, which was perfectly true, and therefore abominable, which was a shade less true. But Palmerston, the Whig Foreign Secretary, had a certain natural sympathy with the

new Orleans monarchy, and for the moment was working in co-operation with Louis Philippe's Government. Disraeli judged rightly that he could not do wrong in attacking a policy so untraditional, and his "very John Bull book," as he described it to his sister, is thick and slab with the commonplaces of patriotism—"unnatural alliances," "hereditary foes," and so forth. Ingredients were added to the cauldron by a German Jew and a renegade Frenchman of the familiar *émigré* type. The gruel did little credit to the trio; as a serious contribution to the discussion of international politics *Gallomania* is beneath contempt; but it served its immediate purpose: *The Times* honoured it with a leading article; and it is worth notice still as illustrating the author's growing realism. He was learning one great lesson in the politician's art—to humour the mob in matters esteemed indifferent in order to get one's way in those considered vital. Later, when he had drawn closer to the Tories, but was still anxious not to estrange the Radicals, Disraeli showed similar discretion in avoiding the home policy of the Whigs and plunging into furious invective against their agreement with the Irish Catholics. No reader of *Popanilla* can imagine Disraeli's mind as tinged with the mildest shade of orange, but Ireland, like the Continent, was a safe subject for the hustings. Few knew anything about it, but nearly everybody had prejudices, and a rousing speech, while doing good to the orator and harm to his enemies, was not likely to affect the main issue one way or the other.

In June 1832 the expected vacancy at length occurred, and Disraeli arrived at Wycombe with letters of recommendation from Daniel O'Connor, Sir Francis Burdett, and Joseph Hume, all obtained through the good offices of Bulwer. Hume withdrew his support when he discovered that Disraeli was opposing the Whig, but the young candidate, convinced that he was taking the town by storm, was undismayed. His public entry into the borough seems to have been exceptionally theatrical even for those days, and for a parallel to his dress and demeanour we have to seek the pages of

fiction. Except that he was very much better looking, Disraeli must have closely resembled the hero of *Ten Thousand a Year* when he sought the suffrages of Yatton. He came in a carriage drawn by four horses ; his coat, laced and ruffled, was lined with pink silk ; and a blue band added glory to his hat. As he drove through the streets he blew kisses at all the women and girls, and, dismounting at the Red Lion Inn, he addressed the crowd from the portico for an hour and a half. According to his own account he made his auditors "all mad" ; many cried ; and poor tonguetied Colonel Grey, the Prime Minister's son, who could only stumble lamely through a short written speech, was so outclassed that Disraeli told his sister he would "never dare appear again." On the other hand, the *Bucks Gazette* made merry at the "harlequinade" of Benjamin's triumphal procession, and, while admitting "some ability" in his speech, spoke of him as a "popinjay" and the "Adonis of the sable cheek."

Though supported by the Tory paper, and employing a Tory as his agent, Disraeli's main appeal was to the Radicals. It was here that he made the declaration that he was "sprung from the people." This expression has been used to suggest that Disraeli was not only aware of a plebeian origin, but rejoiced in it. But it was also at Wycombe that he said, "I am not disposed to admit that my pedigree is not as good as that of the Cavendishes." A patrician pose was in fact one of the constants in a life of many shifts and changes. "Sprung from the people" is an ambiguous phrase. To the crowd it implied kinship with Tom, Dick, and Harry, which Disraeli would not for a moment have admitted. To the orator himself it had an esoteric meaning. "THE PEOPLE" from whom he was sprung were the Chosen People.

In the still unreformed borough, with its tiny electorate, he could obtain only twelve votes to Grey's twenty-three. In a few months the dissolution gave him his second chance, this time with an enlarged register. The Whigs, he had written to *The Times*

after his June defeat, had opposed him, and they should repent it. But they "never could have cast him off, since he had never had the slightest connection with them." He declared that Lord John Russell had once put forward a fishing inquiry as to whether the Whigs could count on his support, and that he had replied with a quip. "You have one claim on my support," he said, "you need it." It is not easy to imagine the cold and proud Russell making timid advances to a young adventurer; but the story well illustrates Disraeli's own state of mind. He was taking himself with portentous gravity. About this time he met Melbourne and flabbergasted him with the almost casual announcement that he wanted to be Prime Minister; and the tone of his second election address at Wycombe contrasts queerly in its audacity with the actual position of the candidate, bothered with debts and regarded askance by respectability. "I come forward," he wrote, "wearing the badge of no party and the livery of no faction"; and he asked the voters to declare against the official politicians. "Rid yourselves of all that political jargon and factious slang of Whig and Tory—two names with one meaning used only to delude you—and unite in forming a great national party which can alone save the country from impending destruction."

Such language is common form with independent candidates, who in England are commonly foolish or vulgarly self-seeking men, and there was little to warn the political world of 1830 that these particular words emanated from one who, though a careerist, was also a man of genius and amazing vision. The rest of the address is a curious blend of Toryism and Radicalism. Disraeli denounced political nepotism, demanded triennial Parliaments, and promised to support any change in the Corn Laws which would "relieve the customer without injuring the farmers." He desired an alteration in the tithe system, yet appeared to favour an increase in the influence of the Church. He called for economy, but could follow no Government which did not originate "some great measure to ameliorate the

condition of the lower orders." He was prepared to vote for the ballot, and told the people to rouse themselves. Much of this was pure Radicalism, and yet every line suggested a Tory accent. The names most often on his lips were those of Bolingbroke and Sir William Wyndham. Some called him a Radical Tory, others a Tory Radical; he called himself a Nationalist. In *Gallomania* he had said that his politics could be described in the one word "England," and perhaps there is no better short description, if we add that England was chiefly important in his eyes as claiming the allegiance of Benjamin Disraeli.

There is, of course, one sense in which the Jew posing as an English Nationalist must provoke a smile, but it is clear that Disraeli had a much juster conception than any native Englishman of what England then was. To him belonged the universal vision which had departed from the islanders with their exit from the European system under Henry VIII. He could see England with the eyes of a foreigner, or even more clearly, since he was free from the distortion of a foreigner's antipathies or idealisations. He had not perhaps a deep knowledge of English history, but what he had read he had read critically, and he knew how little Hampden loved liberty or Cromwell democracy. He could see all the more justly, as member of a race separated from the soil, how little the accumulations of commerce compensated for the destruction of a free peasantry. He could dismiss with contempt the common delusion that "progress" meant improvement all the time and in every way. He realised, as few others did, that the old oligarchy had broken down, and that there must be, to save ultimate anarchy, something in the nature of a Patriot King supported by a patriotic people. What he did not see was that the English hatred of ideas, the English contempt of mere ideologues, would make him suspect and impotent until he had, by quite irrelevant performances, given himself a commanding position in public life. He did not yet understand the English national mind. He thought it could

be fired with enthusiasm for abstract principles. He did not understand that it was chiefly interested in politics as a gladiators' show, and that therefore the independent candidate must be an annoying element of confusion in the political game.

The second Wycombe election helped to open his eyes. Like the first, it ended in his discomfiture. The two Whig candidates, Colonel Grey and Mr. G. R. Smith, a brother of Lord Carrington, were returned, and Disraeli was at the bottom of the poll. Publicly he attributed his defeat to the fact that he was not of "noble blood"; privately he suggested that he had lost because he could spend only £80 on the campaign, whereas Colonel Grey had expended ten times as much. But in any case there was little chance for a young man of no great consequence, who could be accused by the Tories of Radicalism and by the Radicals of Toryism.

Disraeli next issued an address to the electors of the county, but withdrew when he found that two Tories had already been nominated. In the spring of 1833 he dallied with the borough of Marylebone, and published the pamphlet, *What is he?*, in order to rebut the charge that, because he belonged to no party, he was destitute of fixed principles. In this publication he urged a coalition between Tories and Radicals, who should merge both nicknames in "the common, the intelligible, and the dignified title of a National Party." Froude refers to the "ambitiously neutral tint" of this pronouncement. It was impartial, but certainly not neutral. Indeed, it would be difficult to conceive anything less indecisive. Disraeli saw that the Reform Act had brought to an end the old era of purely aristocratic government. He foresaw that the compromise which was actually to be adopted, the working arrangement between the old wealth of the land and the new wealth of industrialism, must end in estranging the bulk of the population from the national life. His vision seems even to have reached to what has at last arrived—two nations with two Governments, the one in possession of the executive machinery, the other

armed with the power of the vote and the ability, when it likes, to embarrass and even strangle the means by which all the community lives. He invariably speaks of trade unions with a certain awe, as if foreseeing the mischief which was to come of giving the working man political power without associating him with the national government. In *What is he?* we find more than a hint of the policy afterwards developed in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*. Disraeli's views then, as ever, are sharp and clear. There is no English woolliness in his mind. Whenever he appears guilty of inconsistency or tergiversation, it is his sense of the expedient, and no impediment in his thought, which is responsible. Thus at Marylebone he has a sop for the urban elector. He advocates a change in taxation "with the object of relieving industry from those incumbrances which property is more capacitated to bear." Here speaks the Disraeli of shifts and devices. The real Disraeli, who knew that no development of town wealth will compensate for decline in the enterprise which is based on the land, is seen eighteen months later in a speech at Aylesbury:

No nation could ever do without agriculture, and a peasantry attached to it; as for the manufacturers of Birmingham or Manchester, they would, if it suited them at any time, migrate to Belgium, France, or Egypt. The agriculturists had a spirit of patriotism.

Time has proved the general truth of this much derided assertion, though its full moral has yet to be appreciated. But the nineteenth-century critics of Disraeli could never grasp that when Disraeli spoke for agriculture he was not thinking solely or even chiefly of the great landlords. He was thinking of a people in process of being as surely dispossessed as his own had been.

Two critical lines, both equally vain, are commonly taken as to the early adventures of Disraeli. The first is to interpret every change of front as indicating a deep-seated depravity, an absence of principle going

far beyond the levity allowable in a young and impressionable man. The other is to explain, by the distortion of facts or the manufacture of motives, that there never was a time when Disraeli played for safety, spoke with his tongue in his cheek, or bent his knee in the House of Rimmon. The plain truth would seem to be that he entered life with political convictions which remained little changed by the lapse of half a century. But he also entered it with the personal conviction that Benjamin Disraeli must have a career. Apart from one or two weaknesses, chiefly connected with his race, no man ever had his mind clearer of cant. But he was by no means averse from the use of cant as a medium of political exchange. He was desperately anxious to reach the House of Commons, and to achieve that end he would just as soon flatter a pack of London shopkeepers as weave a web of enchantments round a Buckinghamshire grandee. What he would not do so far was to deliver himself over intellectually to any gang or any individual.

Nothing came of the Marylebone business, and Disraeli returned to "lounging and pleasure," with the sheriff's officer always in the offing. It was now, in his thirtieth year, that a crisis happened in his private life. He fell in love with the woman who served as the model for Henrietta Temple in the novel of that name. The affair lasted for three years, and involved him in an excitation which threatened his political ambitions. Just before meeting the original of Henrietta he had written to his sister in that tone of calm and confident cynicism which is so often succeeded in men of his type by a wave of passion :

All my friends who married for love and beauty either beat their wives or live apart from them. This is literally the case. I may commit many follies in life, but I never intend to marry for love, which I am sure is a guarantee of infelicity.

A few months afterwards he was writing in his diary, quoted by Mr. Monypenny :

One incident has indeed made this year the happiest of my life. How long will these feelings last ?

Even when his passion was at its fiercest, however, he had his doubts. That he, the convinced philanderer, was for once in his life under the dominion of an impulse so strong that he felt "fame a juggle and posterity a lie," is certain. His nature was affectionate ; his imagination vivid. But he was of the type which resents the slavery of love even in the rapture of the first surrender. From his biographers little can be gathered as to the character of his relations with the lady or as to the reasons which led him to end them. But more may be learned from the novel if we identify Henrietta Temple with his own Henrietta and Ferdinand Armine with himself. It would then be inferred that she was an unmarried girl, but that circumstances permitted a degree of intimacy unusual between single persons of opposite sex in those closely chaperoned days. It may also be surmised that the eventual cause of parting was the lady's lack of means and the lover's money embarrassments. The difficulties keep Armine and Henrietta apart until the last chapters, when, for the sake of the conventional happy ending, the novelist at last finds her a great fortune. The romance of flesh and blood ended, as most flesh and blood romances do, in a confession of failure. *Henrietta Temple*, Dr. Brandes has written, "is altogether a book that speaks from the heart," and no discriminating reader can escape the impression that it is in the main as autobiographical as *David Copperfield*. Was the real Henrietta the wonderful being of the book, "a rare and extraordinary combination of intellectual strength and physical softness," and one "for whom a man of genius would willingly peril the empire of the world ?" The words were written under the dominion of a passion which "sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt," and is equally prone to find wit in mere pertness, calm wisdom in stolidity, and

gay innocence in coarseness. These questions are not readily resolved owing to the inhuman reticence of those who should know much about the affair. We are left in doubt as to the extent of his actual commitment. Eminently masculine in mind, he was on the whole curiously sexless in the better known periods of his life ; loving women's society, he apparently derived his chief pleasure from their prattle and their counsel ; the desire of possession seems to have been small, and it is to be conjectured that Disraeli's grand passion, powerfully as it affected his imagination, had no very robust animal basis. But whoever and whatever Henrietta was, whatever the charm with which she held his love, and whatever the degree to which her love got the better of his judgment and restraint, her reign came in due course to an end. Disraeli decided not to imperil on her account "the empire of the world," or even his own then very problematical career. Nor does the affair, serious as it was while it lasted, seem to have left any permanent wound. The cynical wisdom so suddenly dropped is as suddenly resumed.¹

Despite the "lounging and pleasure" of this period, or

¹ Henrietta in the novel is an unmarried girl. Was the real Henrietta a married woman? The following points are submitted for the consideration of the reader :—

(1) The freedom with which she and Disraeli met, to be inferred not only from the novel but from Buckle's references and quotations from diaries, etc.

(2) The length of time the affair lasted. Three years with no apparent suggestion of an engagement.

(3) Buckle's cautious and reticent handling of this passage in Disraeli's life.

(4) Disraeli's acquaintance at this period with the wife of a certain Sir Francis Sykes, *née* Henrietta Villebois. Published fragments of Disraeli's papers show that, while he had no notion of Sir Francis's conversation, he found Lady Sykes attractive. Sichel, in his *Disraeli : A Study in Personality and Ideas*, makes the curious remark that Lady Aphrodite, in *The Young Duke*, may have been drawn from "a certain Lady Sykes."

(5) If Lady Sykes were the Henrietta of Disraeli's romance, it can be well understood why he brought the love affair to an end for the sake of his career.

perhaps even because of it, Disraeli was consolidating his position. By this time he could claim friends in great numbers and of all varieties. We see him becoming from the protégé the familiar of Count D'Orsay, Lady Blessington's son-in-law, and we have a delightful letter in which the distinguished Bohemian, himself always in difficulties, lectures Disraeli on the futility of merely patching up his affairs—"Tous ces plasterings-over," he says, cannot take the place of a fundamental settlement, preferably with old Isaac's money. We see him with his so potent charm stirring the withered but still susceptible heart of the old Countess of Cork, who had once enchanted Johnson and now loved one of whom Johnson might well have said piquant things. Two duchesses at least give him a welcome that never wore thin. He is introduced to Almack's and put up for Crockford's. Among politicians he is now on a footing of intimacy with Lord Lyndhurst; he finds the Duke of Wellington "very civil"; while Lord Durham and Daniel O'Connor are useful in maintaining touch with the party in power. If nothing of length proceeded from his pen, he could afford to rest on his laurels, for his social successes had revived interest in *Vivian Grey* and the other novels, and there was now no danger of oblivion. He had more recently published two short satires entitled *Ixion in Heaven* and *The Infernal Marriage*. They have as much humour as wit, and he who wrote them must have been a happier man than the author of *Popanilla*. He himself is Ixion, the mortal whom the immortals cannot awe, who examines their godhead with a cool scepticism, and at last falls through excess of daring. In *The Infernal Marriage* there is a touch of deeper thought. The comparison between the Elysians, "the very cream of terrestrial society," and "the Gnomes," a nation "made on purpose to wait on them," has its sting; and there is a touch of personal bitterness in the tribute to the liberal nature of the Elysians, who, even if their social inferiors "could do nothing better than write a poem or a novel," would always give them a bow, and

"sometimes indeed even admitted them into their circles."

To the same period belongs *The Revolutionary Epick*, published in 1834, an ambitious literary adventure which can only be explained on the assumption that the Henrietta affair had produced a violent exaltation of mind. Disraeli, possessor of a poetical temperament, was not a poet. He had the poet's vision but not the power of giving shape to what he saw. "It was on the plains of Troy," he writes, "that I first conceived the idea of this work," and he goes on in a strain that suggests that he had persuaded himself that he was in the hierarchical succession to Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton. "Like the lightning which was then playing over Ida," it flashed across his mind that the poet had ever embodied the spirit of his age. The *Iliad* was a heroic, the *Aeneid* a political, the *Divine Comedy* a national, *Paradise Lost* a religious Epic. "What, I exclaimed, the Revolution of France a less important event than the Siege of Troy? Is Napoleon a less interesting character than Achilles? For me remains the Revolutionary Epick." Despite these brave words, however, some doubt remains to torture the ambitious young bard. He confesses that he was perhaps too rash to deem himself a Poet, and declares himself ready—a most unpoetlike attitude—to accept the verdict of his contemporaries; if it were unfavourable, he proposed, without a pang, to "hurl his lyre to Limbo." These misgivings are to be traced to a private recital of a canto of the epic, given before a small literary company at Austen's house. Samuel Warren, the author of *Ten Thousand a Year*, retorted with an impromptu parody, and the general reception was such that Disraeli's sincerest friends discouraged him from further service to the muse. Nothing, however, could restrain him from challenging a public verdict. But when the beginning of the work was published he became convinced that Limbo was the fitting destination of his lyre, and the *Epic* was never completed. Thirty years after its unhappy ghost returned to haunt

him. A political antagonist quoted some lines to show that Disraeli, by that time a Conservative leader, had once been an advocate of tyrannicide :

And blessed be the hand that dares to wave
The regicidal steel that shall redeem
A Nation's sorrow with a tyrant's blood.

Two effective replies were open to him. He might have said that the sentiments were not his own, but those of one of the characters in the poem, or he might have pleaded the indiscretion of youth, with the added remark that if he had erred he had erred in pious company, since Mr. Gladstone himself had once concocted an ode to the Cato Street conspirators. Instead he took the very foolish step of reprinting the *Epick*, with the more bloodthirsty passages softened, thus giving point to a frivolous charge, and enabling John Bright to make more out of his evasion than the original affair justified. It is certain, for the rest, that Disraeli had never intended the *Epick* as a revolutionary manifesto. On the eve of publication, indeed, he had asked the Duke of Wellington to accept its dedication.

If, as an author, Disraeli in love showed some signs of the imperfect balance common to that malady, the period was one in which he shone socially. His "wonderful powers of conversation" are attested in many memoirs of the thirties, and he was everywhere beginning to be marked as one of the characters of the day—not as yet, however, in the least a serious character. The American writer, N. P. Willis, who met him at Lady Blessington's, wrote in *Pencillings by the Way* :

He is lividly pale, and, but for the energy of his action and the strength of his lungs, would seem to be the victim of consumption. His eye is black as Erebus, and has the most mocking, lying-in-wait sort of expression conceivable. . . . His hair is as extraordinary as his taste in waistcoats. A thick, heavy mass of jet-black ringlets falls over his left cheek almost to his collarless stock, while on the right temple it is parted and put away with the smooth carefulness of a girl's.

On the evening that this chronicler met him Disraeli "in thrilling accents" related the famous story of the death of Sarsfield. He gave it some astonishing embellishments and was wrong on every point of fact. The Jacobite General, mortally wounded at Landen, became in his tale "an Irish dragoon who was killed in the Peninsula," and his cry, "If that had been for Ireland!" was introduced as a toast which the Irish hero proposed over a silver goblet which he had "filled with his own blood." Yet, elsewhere, Willis writes that Disraeli was "anything but a declaimer," and that if he caught himself in a rhetorical sentence he would mock at himself in the next breath. Both statements are no doubt true, though they are not reconciled; it can be well understood how swift changes of mood left all such observers gasping or carping. Simple people who looked for consistency were bound to find such a man as Disraeli merely incredible as anything but a mountebank and poser. They could not understand that the great man, notwithstanding the favourite generalisation of the biographers, is never simple. He may often have simplicity, which is a very different thing; but the very nature of greatness is a mixture of elements. Thus irony is on the whole the sworn foe of poetry, but the greatest of poets are always ironists. Shakespeare is so great because he can always laugh at himself in his sublimest flights; Milton is so much less great because he can never laugh at himself or, for that matter, at anything. Gladstone was a political Milton; Disraeli a political Shakespeare. Gladstone took Gladstone with the complete seriousness in which a horse takes itself. Disraeli in one sense always and sometimes in many senses took himself very seriously, but there were also times when it did appear to him exceedingly funny that he, a "forked radish," should have thoughts that reached the stars. He could, in short, mock at himself as well as at others; and that is disconcerting to equine types of men. But when he pleased he could charm all but everybody, and could suit himself to very different companies. He was steeped in Byron, and in advance of

many of his contemporaries recognised the genius of Shelley ; yet when he found himself sitting by some gushing young " blue " he could delight her with the assurance that Bob Southey was the greatest genius of the age.

With great men, or at least men in great place, he had now gone far. On Lyndhurst and Durham, potentates in opposite camps, he had made a deep impression. The Duke of Wellington was civil, though a little cold. With the Marquess of Chandos, a power in Buckinghamshire, he played as cleverly as Vivian Grey with his Marquess. But there was still little progress towards the realisation of his ambition. It was not merely the poor man's normal difficulty of getting anything out of a rich man or even making the rich man pay a just price for what he takes. There was a most real difficulty of deciding which set of rich men to cultivate. Disraeli to the marrow of his bones was an enemy to Whiggism—if he held a constant principle it was this—and he had moreover the prescience to see that, though the Whigs had come back with a majority of three hundred on the morrow of Reform, they had no staying power. They had only dealt with symptoms ; the disease remained. The real demand was not votes, but bread ; the people were not satisfied with the abolition of a few rotten boroughs ; they wanted the removal of rotten economic conditions. The formation of trade unions filled with pained amaze Ministers such as Grey and Melbourne, who had imagined that all would be well once Manchester and Birmingham sent Members to Westminster. The Dorchester labourers who had had the audacity to combine were duly put on the sea to Australia ; but there was no thought of dealing with the causes of their discontent ; for the distress the Whigs had a single remedy—the workhouse. In Ireland, also, affairs were going from bad to worse ; the Catholics were now theoretically emancipated, but in practice were excluded from every office of profit, and Stanley, the Viceroy, was applying coercion in the harshest and least imaginative fashion. As Melbourne

put it, "What all the wise men promised had not happened, and what all the damned fools said would happen had come to pass." Reform and emancipation had brought no peace, but a new armoury of swords.

Here, if ever, was the time for the renovation of the Tory Party which Disraeli's speeches had advocated at Wycombe. But, unfortunately, of the two Tory leaders neither was likely to impress the national mind. There was little promise in Wellington, with his rigid military character, or in Peel, earnest and intelligent, but wholly lacking in imagination. The Radicals, with whom Disraeli still hoped an alliance might be formed, were little better. "The cant of Radicalism," says Froude, "was becoming distasteful to Disraeli." Would it not have been truer to say that the spirit of Radicalism was changing? It was passing from the sturdy and bucolic patriotism of William Cobbett to the pedlaresque internationalism of Richard Cobden, and rapidly becoming a merely urban and sectional creed. To Disraeli there was now simply a choice between two evils. To join any party was to limit himself, but experience had taught him the difficulty of standing alone. With a General Election apparently imminent, he decided that the main thing was to get a seat, and he was prepared, since no party offered him a policy to which he could unreservedly subscribe, to support that party which was ready to recognise him. He had friends in both camps. On the one side Lyndhurst and Chandos were both working for him, and he believed, though probably without ground, that Wellington was doing as much. At the same time he did not hesitate to solicit the aid of Durham, who, however, after the manner of Radical Peers, was chary of committing himself, and finally offered nothing but good wishes.

A man thus willing to accept support from politicians as opposed as the High Tory Chandos, whom the slang of a later period would have dubbed a typical backwoodsman, and the head of the House of Lambton, who rejoiced in the nickname of "Radical Jack," could hardly escape suspicion. "A mighty impartial person-

age," Greville described him. "I do not think," he added, "such a man will do, though just such as Lord Lyndhurst would be connected with." Lyndhurst had few prejudices. Of Irish-American descent, the son of the painter Copley, a former Radical and almost a Jacobin, he was commonly conceived as being encumbered with no unnecessary impedimenta in the way of scruple, and he saw in his Jewish friend a fellow opportunist who would no doubt slough his whimsies the moment he arrived at Westminster. The patronage of a lawyer-statesman of this brilliant type was of dubious benefit to one whose vacillations had earned more distrust than they perhaps really merited, and Lyndhurst failed in his attempt to get the borough of Lynn, an appanage of the Bentinck family, for Disraeli. The question was put to Lord George Bentinck, afterwards to be so closely allied with Lyndhurst's protégé, but, according to Greville, Lord George "would not hear of him."

Meanwhile history was rapidly being made. In November, 1834, the King broke the rules of the Constitutional game, dismissed his Whig Ministers, and sent for Wellington, who advised him to ask Peel, who was then at Rome, to undertake charge of affairs. "It was a lively season, that winter of 1834," wrote Disraeli in *Coningsby* :

People sprang up like mushrooms; town suddenly became full. Everybody who had been in office, and everybody who wished to be in office; everybody who had ever had anything and everybody who ever expected to have anything, were alike visible. All of course by mere accident. . . . But, after all, who were to form the Government, and what was the Government? Was it to be a Tory Government, or an Enlightened-Spirit-of-the-Age, Liberal-Moderate, Reform Government; was it to be a Government of high philosophy or of low practice; of principle or of expediency; of great measures or of little men? A Government of statesmen or of clerks? Of Humbug or of Humdrum? Great questions these, but unfortunately there was nobody to answer them.

Also, to judge from the conversation of Tadpole and Taper in the same novel, it was a season of much wire-pulling, in which Disraeli, no doubt, was not idle. But the coveted nomination did not materialise, and in the end he went for a third time to Wycombe, in a hopeless attempt to prevail against the Carrington-Grey interest. Although he was now recognised as the Tory candidate, his address, later issued as a pamphlet under the title of *The Crisis Examined*, retained much of his old independence. Thus of Ireland he wrote that a year "must not pass over without the very name of Tithes in that country being abolished for ever," and to the English Dissenters he expressed himself equally liberal in the matter of Church rates. Yet, refusing to toe any line, he was emphatic against disendowment. "I know," he said, "the love that great lords, and especially great Whig Lords, have for Abbey lands and great tithes; I remember Woburn, and I profit by the reminiscence." His chief card, however, was relief for agriculturists, and on such a matter as the malt tax he used language which every farmer's boy could understand. To the fallen Whigs he showed no mercy, but he would not yet commit himself to Peel. "I am for measures, gentlemen," he said, "not men." But the most remarkable passage at this time of day is that in which he stated his views on consistency:

A statesman is the creature of his age, the child of circumstance, the creation of his times. A statesman is essentially a practical character. The conduct and opinions of public men at different periods of their career must not be too curiously contrasted in a free and aspiring country. The people have their passions, and it is even the duty of public men occasionally to adopt sentiments with which they do not sympathise, because the people must have leaders.

Disraeli, who believed in great men and the power of genius to overcome all obstacles, would almost certainly have agreed with Mr. Chesterton that the *zeitgeist* is the one ghost which has never existed. "The spirit of the age is the very thing that a great man changes," says Sidonia in *Coningsby*. Sidonia's

creator did not utter the words quoted above as a mere apology for himself. They were written in anticipatory defence of the Conservative leaders, the men who had opposed emancipation and had stood for "conservation of chaos," but who, Disraeli now hoped, were about to promulgate a national and even a democratic policy. Peel would in that case be accused of turning his coat; Disraeli would welcome his appearance in new colours, always supposing that the colours were to his taste. But Peel decided to be colourless. He issued the mass of elegant platitudes known as the Tamworth Manifesto. Disraeli's contempt, his bitter disappointment for that famous document, is eloquently expressed in *Coningsby*:

The Tamworth Manifesto of 1834 was an attempt to construct a party without principles; its basis therefore was necessarily Latitudinarianism; and its inevitable consequence has been Political Infidelity.

Instead of reviving Toryism, it inaugurated something called Conservatism:

Conservatism assumes in theory that everything established should be maintained; but adopts in practice that everything that is established is indefensible. To reconcile this theory and this practice, they produce what they call "the best bargain"; some arrangement which has no principle and no purpose, except to obtain a temporary lull of agitation until the mind of the Conservative, without a guide and without an aim, distracted, tempted, and bewildered, is prepared for another arrangement, equally statesmanlike with the preceding one. . . . Conservatism discards Prescription, shrinks from Principle, disavows Progress; having rejected all respect for Antiquity, it offers no redress for the Present, and makes no preparation for the Future.

Such was Disraeli's frank opinion of the new policy, which so closely reflected the cold and unimaginative nature of its author. To Peel three courses were open. He could maintain a merely obstructive attitude to all change, but with an electorate no longer to be scared with Jacobins, "sprung from night and hell," that promised failure. He could revive Toryism as a positive

and creative thing, fighting the old Whig Oligarchs and the new plutocracy, and forming an alliance of Throne, Church, and People. That was Disraeli's plan, and there were some of the elements which promised success. Great numbers of people, weary of faction, were favourable to a moderate restoration of the Royal prerogatives, and the King's dismissal of the Whig Ministers was decidedly popular. The Church was beginning to feel the effects of the ferment which the Wesleyan movement had, strangely enough, set working, though its effect was to stimulate ideas extremely unlike Wesley's. The frost of eighteenth century rationalism was losing its grip, and a new race of priests, keenly alive to the evils which had grown up in an age of practical unbelief, was exercising great influence on a new race of aristocrats. As for the masses, they were, to put the matter at its lowest, better disposed to distant tyrants than to the oppressors of the fields and the factories.

But clearly any such policy demanded a great man. Whether Disraeli himself, under favouring circumstances, could have risen to the splendour of his own visions can now be only a matter of conjecture. It is certain that Peel, in no circumstances, could have succeeded in giving to Toryism this character. He was above all a man of negative mind ; too much interested in the working of the political machine to think much about its purpose, still less about the ultimate consequences of its operation. Superb in defence, he resembled those generals who are admired for the perfect manner in which they lose a campaign. Where another man would look for victory, his mind was occupied with contriving the wholly satisfactory formula and explanation of surrender. In a word, his sole policy was to leave the initiative to the enemy, to delay and trip him up, and finally to secure at the sacrifice of his own rank-and-file honourable treatment and good consideration for himself.

That was the secret of the Tamworth Manifesto. What was Disraeli to do ? He saw, as clearly as man

could see, that the policy was one of despair, that it must fail, and that some day the leader of "the gentlemen of England" would be repudiated as a betrayer. But meanwhile Peel was the head of a party which, by the unpopularity of the Whigs, was bound to come into office. It was Quixotism to let the chance go. Disraeli threw in his lot with the new Conservatism, not because of the Tamworth Manifesto, rather in spite of it. The thing might be annoyingly stupid. But after all a stupid party has its advantages for a clever young man. In 1834 the die was cast. Disraeli is now to be classified as a Conservative.

CHAPTER IV

FOR the third time the verdict of Wycombe went against Disraeli. In his *Life* of Wellington, Sir Herbert Maxwell quotes a letter which the defeated candidate wrote on the morrow of the poll :

I have fought our battle and I have lost it. I am now a cipher ; but if the devotion of my energies to your cause, In and Out, can ever avail you, your Grace may count upon me, who seeks no greater satisfaction than that of serving a really great man.

Disraeli could never condescend to the niceties of syntax, and occasionally his taste was no less defective than his grammar. What the Iron Duke thought of this somewhat excessive protestation of devotion must remain conjectural, but his third-person note of acknowledgment suggests no great eagerness to bind Disraeli to him.

Others, however, were more responsive. The General Election, though it cost the Whigs heavily, still left the Conservatives in a minority of a hundred, and Peel, in office but not in power, was compelled after a few months to resign. However, the combination of Whigs, Radicals, and Irish which defeated him was anything but a happy family, and there was naturally much intriguing for the formation of a new coalition. In one such attempt, aiming at a combination between the Conservatives and those of the Whigs who disliked their allies of the Left Wing, Disraeli was a strictly unofficial liaison officer. An administration based on such a coalition would have been utterly repugnant to his tastes, but he loved a plot for its own sake, and this adventure offered him no little chance of distinguishing himself as a go-between, for on the one hand he had the confidence of Lyndhurst, Peel's Lord Chancellor, and

on the other he was on terms of warm friendship with Mrs. Norton, the woman of letters whose relations with Melbourne were at least affectionate. Two members of a former Whig Government—Stanley and Graham—were shortly to cross the floor of the House of Commons, while Grey was certainly more in sympathy with Peel than with O'Connell. But nothing could be done without Melbourne, and in counting on Melbourne the conspirators made a bad mistake. Superficially he was the most easy and casual of men. It was his complaint of politics that people "hate each other so damnably," and, apart from the pleasure of obliging an agreeable woman, he was on general principles all for letting no pedantry of principle interfere with personal amenity. But above all else he was the good party man. Of course, when Radical and Papist votes had to be bought something had to be given in exchange; he could and did jettison certain cherished Whig principles; but the Whig name and party were sacred to him. Politics to him were a game, but that was all the more reason for playing it according to the rules, and to his very English character Disraeli had no key.

The second coalition plot was wilder in appearance, but more promising in reality, and its success would have raised Disraeli at once to greatness; it would have afforded him, moreover, a chance to put some, at least, of his theories into practice. The King, having dismissed the Whigs, was naturally furious at their return, and ready to welcome any chance of ousting them. Peel was too respectful of Constitutional usage to be of any service to him; but Lyndhurst had no such scruples, and while Peel was "silent in the House of Commons or sulking at Drayton" the lawyer and the monarch were in frequent consultation. Lyndhurst was as careless of his leader as of the Constitution. "What is Peel to me?" he asked Lord Campbell. "Damn Peel." On the other hand, his friendship with Brougham was very close, and Brougham, left out of the Government by Melbourne, was burning for revenge on his former associates. The two ex-Chancellors

were confident of their ability to govern the country between them, and both had that touch of the gamble which is needed for a *coup d'état*. Disraeli was privy to their plans, and place for him was a part of the compact. This was, to do him justice, not the whole attraction of the scheme ; the tendency of his mind was ever towards something approaching autocracy, and whatever promised to strengthen the Royal Prerogative harmonised with his general plans for the renovation of Toryism. Why the plot failed can only be a matter of conjecture. Lyndhurst was in the habit of burning his correspondence, and this practice, though it has not saved his reputation, has left considerable blanks in political history. Disraeli apparently remained under the belief that Peel's timidity caused the public to rally to the Whigs at the critical moment, but it may well have been that the King, little as he liked Melbourne, had a still more invincible feeling against Brougham. When one remembers the tone of the latter's correspondence with William IV and the affair of the Great Seal, which he lost at a country-house orgy, finding it again in the course of a game of blind man's buff, the monarch's distrust cannot be deemed unreasonable.

Although nothing came of either plot, Disraeli's share may have been a sign to the party managers that he was not a person to be safely neglected, and in 1835 he was invited to contest Taunton against one of the minor Whig Ministers seeking re-election on acceptance of office. It was stated at the time that he was liberally supplied with the money from the party fund, and it is known that Lord Chandos started a subscription for him at the Carlton Club.

Possibly in consequence Disraeli thought it necessary to clear himself of all suspicion of holding heretical opinions. "If there be anything on which I pride myself," he said, "it is my political consistency," and with this he proceeded to unsay or explain away much that he had written or spoken only a few months before.

In particular he withdrew his views as to tithe in Ireland—a subject which, owing to the “Rathcormack massacre” (a tithe incident in which thirteen people were killed) had become a burning question. He now argued that the tithe trouble had been caused by agitation: “It is agitation that has made the nuisance, and it is the Whig Party who for their own ends have encouraged the agitation.” At Taunton, where legends of Sedgemoor and King Monmouth still lingered, Protestant feeling was strong, and a sure way to draw a cheer was to say that the Whigs had offered the Whiteboys a premium to do murder, to call O’Connell “traitor” and “incendiary,” and to jeer at the “Popish tariff of salvation.” Revelling in such strong meat, the Somersetshire voters might forget that this singular Conservative candidate had quite recently advocated the ballot and triennial Parliaments. But should their memory be tenacious he had an ingenious explanation; while the Whig Party seemed dominant, he declared, he favoured frequent dissolutions as a means of breaking their power; with the Whig Party shattered these measures were no longer necessary.

For want of those “rascal counters,” in short, Disraeli was ceasing to be a free man. “To govern Ireland according to the policy of Charles I and not of Oliver Cromwell” is the ideal expressed in the Preface to *Lothair*, written when he was old in practical statesmanship, and it was in truth the only ideal for one who believed in the historical continuity of Toryism. But from Taunton onwards we are sure of finding the real Disraeli nowhere save in his novels. There he continued to speak his mind; on the platform and in Parliament he had to suit his utterance to the average sense of his party. No man of his genius could, of course, become a mere echo, but genius without cash finds itself acquainted with awkward bed-fellows, with whom it cannot afford to quarrel. How he justified himself is best seen by a quotation from the study of Bolingbroke in the *Vindication of the English Constitution*:

Opposed to the Whigs on principle, for an oligarchy is hostile

to genius, and recoiling from the Tory tenets, which his unprejudiced and vigorous mind taught him at the same time to dread and to condemn, Lord Bolingbroke, at the outset of his career, incurred the commonplace imputation of insincerity and inconsistency, because in an age of unsettled parties, with professions contradictory to their conduct, he maintained that vigilant and meditative independence which is the privilege of an original and determined spirit. It is probable that in the earlier years of his career he meditated the formation of a new party, that dream of youthful ambition in a perplexed and discordant age, but destined in English politics to be never more substantial than a vision. More experienced in political life, he became aware that he had only to choose between the Whigs and the Tories.

These words may be applied almost literally to the writer. Disraeli opposed the Whigs because their scheme held no place for genius—that is, for his own peculiar genius. He joined the Conservatives only when he saw no other chance of entering public life. It was a choice between servitude and impotent and ruinously expensive freedom, and he chose servitude with the hope that, once secure of a great position in the party, he could play Bolingbroke's part, and wean it from what he deemed its senilities. As to the difficulties of political independence in England he was undoubtedly right, but in estimating his own potentialities of influence he was over-sanguine. In course of time he did "educate his party" into adopting measures which the average Radical of 1835 would hardly have demanded, but, save in one direction, he failed to change the Conservative mind. It remained on the whole a negative force. The *Vindication of the English Constitution*, which was a statement of those Tory Democratic principles which he hoped to instil, had far less effect than the merely opportunistic Tamworth Manifesto. The tendencies of the age were in truth against him. It was a time when men were too busy to think. They were making money, and had ears only for those who told them that every day they would make more money. The nineteenth century was saturated with the notion that there could be henceforth no

essential change, but only progress on present lines. The man who preached that to-morrow might differ from to-day as much as to-day from yesterday might be entertaining as a paradox-monger. He was lightly regarded as a prophet.

Taunton followed Wycombe in rejecting Disraeli. At a dinner after the poll he made a characteristic speech in defence of the Throne and the Church. "The King of England," he said, "is in effect the great leader of the people against a usurping aristocracy." The Church of England, established and endowed, was the popular Church, whereas the "voluntary system" in ecclesiastical matters was essentially aristocratic, since it meant that "no man should be saved who could not pay for salvation." But the Taunton adventure is chiefly memorable for the quarrel with O'Connell. The Irish tribune, who, at Bulwer's request, had acted as one of Disraeli's sponsors at Wycombe, felt that he had a legitimate grievance when stigmatised as an incendiary and traitor by one who had so recently made use of his name and influence. Those were days of plain speaking, and Irishmen are at no time mealy-mouthed. O'Connell, however, went somewhat beyond the limits of controversial propriety even then attaining. He described Disraeli as a liar, a creature, a disgrace to his species, a miscreant of abominable, foul, and atrocious nature, and "the heir-at-law of the blasphemous thief who died upon the cross." Disraeli thereupon challenged O'Connell's son—the elder O'Connell, having once killed his man in an affair of honour, had made a public vow never to fight again—but the invitation was declined. Disraeli, whose pluck could never be denied, seems to have been in a genuinely gunpowder mood, and declared that he would not be "insulted even by a Yahoo, without chastising it." But, rage as he would, he could not get satisfaction, and even in the wordy war that followed he experienced the common fate of users of the *tu quoque*. His sneers at O'Connell's religion were more bitter than witty, and there was something a little absurd in his threat of what would

happen when he and O'Connell "met at Philippi"—in other words, in the House of Commons. Disraeli had a genuine sense of humour, but it was undependable, and seems to have served him indifferently at this moment. He gained notoriety through the Taunton episode, but little credit. Wellington, indeed, is said to have applauded him for "the most damned gentlemanly thing he had heard of for some time," but the *Spectator*, impartial in its dislike of both parties, compared Disraeli to a "puppy yelping under the pain of a kick from some strong-limbed horse."

In one way, certainly, the affair was unfortunate. Disraeli could have brought to bear on Irish questions a clarity and charity impossible to an Englishman, and both before and after the quarrel he insisted that the historical traditions and real character of the Tory Party were in conflict with the attitude towards Ireland common to nearly all British statesmen during the nineteenth century. But while the feud with O'Connell endured nobody did more to inflame anti-Irish feeling in England. His fulminations at Taunton, designed to catch yokel votes, would have been forgotten in a week. The series of letters he contributed to *The Times* at the beginning of 1836, under the pseudonym of "Runnymede," were long invoked in Irish controversies. They contain many happy and ingenious phrases, much witty banter, passages of savage irony at the expense of the Whigs, and some fulsome flattery, obviously insincere, of Peel, "the only hope of a suffering people." But the hatred of O'Connell that runs through the series suggests monomania. Of O'Connell, whatever his faults, it might be said, as it was of one of his far more formidable compatriots, that he was "less revolutionary than an average English shopkeeper," yet in the first of the "Runnymede" articles Disraeli pictures him as "Eblis with Captain Rock's bloody cap shadowing his atrocious countenance"; and in another article, dedicated to "the People of England," he gives the following answer to the question, "Who is this O'Connell?":

O'Connell is not yet as great as Robespierre, although he

resembles that terrific agitator in everything except his disinterestedness. . . . This man . . . is the hired instrument of the Papacy; as such his mission is to destroy your Protestant society, and as such he is a more terrible enemy to England than Napoleon. . . . He has not a single quality of a great man. . . . A systematic liar and a beggarly cheat, a swindler and a poltroon. . . . His public and his private life are equally profligate. . . . He has said that all your men are cowards and all your women wantons. He has reviled your illustrious princes, he has sneered at your pure religion, he has assailed your National Church. He has endeavoured to stir up rebellion against your august Senate, and has described your House of Commons, even when reformed, as an assembly of six hundred scoundrels.

To such poor bludgeon-play could anger reduce one who had already proved himself a pretty master of the rapier. That in calm moments the wrist had not lost its strength and cunning is seen in a hundred delicate touches in these very letters. The description of Palmerston as "the Lord Fanny of diplomacy . . . cajoling France with an airy compliment and menacing Russia with a perfumed cane" has become classical. The prayer to Melbourne that he should cease to "saunter over the destinies of the nation, and lounge away the glories of an empire," and the sketch of the same statesman "sipping the last novel of Paul de Kock, while lounging over a sun-dial" are no less admirable; while the portrait of Spring Rice, made Chancellor of the Exchequer because he was "a man of business," is good reading for a generation which has had ample experience of statesmen with similar qualifications. Lord Brougham's genius he admits; it marks him from "the slaves who crouch to O'Connell." On the other hand, Lord John Russell, a member of the hated Whig oligarchy, "makes it possible to understand how the ancient Egyptians worshipped an insect"; while Lord William Bentinck is dismissed as a "drivelling nabob." The letters to Peel and Stanley are too adulatory to be models even of the panegyrical style. When Disraeli years afterwards described Peel as "the greatest Member of Parliament that ever lived," he was probably sincere, though Gladstone pronounced the

eulogy to be left-handed, and as such it was almost certainly intended. Disraeli felt towards his leader as the artist always must towards the mere artisan, a mixture of reluctant respect for his acquirements and spontaneous contempt for his gifts. But in the "Runnymede" letters Peel, leaving the "halls and bowers of Drayton," where he "realised the romance of Verulam" and enjoyed the "lettered leisure that Temple loved," to become the "saviour of the nation," is treated like some god descending from Olympus. After all this it is a fall to the commonplace to be told that "Pitt himself in the plenitude of his power never enjoyed more cordial confidence." Most assuredly Disraeli never at any time felt like this of Peel. Even more certainly Stanley, whom he lauds for having left one Government and having declined office in another, commanded none of his admiration. The deft rejection of awkward honours is a hereditary gift in the house of Stanley which has led them from strength to strength and from glory to glory; and it is quite improbable that Disraeli believed the abnegation of this "young eagle," "this heir of the House of Derby," to be anything but a manœuvre. Disraeli must have known that Stanley disliked him—loathing was rather the word—and that Stanley had called him a scoundrel. But Stanley was a rising power, and worth conciliating. Stanley, however, was not yet to be conciliated. Peel, less familiar with the way of the horse-coper, and never tired of hearing himself called "the Just," seems on the other hand to have been pleasantly affected by flattery laid on so lavishly. Anyhow, since the young man had made some position for himself, Peel accepted him as he accepted every other accomplished fact.

The "Runnymede" articles had another effect. As a contributor who had attracted much attention, Disraeli had the good-will of *The Times*, his speeches were always noticed, and occasionally he received the distinction of a first-person report. Things, in short,

were going very well with him. Politically, money remained his chief trouble. His life was expensive; electioneering, with whatever help he may have received, must have been a costly business; his infatuation for Henrietta, which lost him the opportunity of at least one rich marriage, could hardly increase the indulgence of his creditors. A sudden rush of literary activity at this time is to be explained by the desperate nature of his finances when he at last roused himself from the dream of a world well lost for love. He had begun *Henrietta Temple* in the full heyday of his passion; it was finished when that passion was spent. The novel was published towards the end of 1836 when the duns were in full hue and cry. To a dinner of Buckinghamshire Conservatives, at which he was to propose the toast of the House of Lords, Disraeli went in the fear that he might be arrested before the eyes of the company, and a little earlier he had refused, with what anguish we may imagine, an invitation to dine with Peel in the dread that a sheriff's officer might tap him on the shoulder on the great man's very doorstep.

In such circumstances finishing *Henrietta Temple* must have been a dreary business. The ashes of that love, scarcely cold, had to be shaken from their funeral urn and raked over for the materials to charm a cheque from the publisher. That Disraeli felt the profanation is evident from the many passages in which his hero's financial entanglements are lamented:

Debt is the prolific mother of folly and crime; it taints the course of life in all its dreams. Hence so many unhappy marriages, so many prostituted pens, and venal politicians! It hath a small beginning but a giant's growth and strength. When we make the monster we make our master, who haunts us at all hours, and shakes his whip of scorpions for ever in our sight.

Yet when Disraeli could look back calmly on this season of pecuniary stress he regretted nothing. Dealing with usurers, making shifts and devising stratagems, had been a valuable part of his worldly education. In retrospect, at least, he was, like the young Fakredeem in *Tancred*, "fond of his debts."

"I should be incapable of anything," said that strange personage, "if it were not for my debts. I am naturally so indolent that if I did not remember in the morning that I was ruined I should never be able to distinguish myself. . . . What are my debts to my resources? That is the point. . . . A man may have an idea worth twenty estates, a principle of action that will bring in a greater harvest than all Lebanon."

Again :

What should I be without my debts, dear companions of my life that never desert me? All my knowledge of human nature is owing to them; it is in managing my affairs that I have sounded the depths of the human heart, recognised all the combinations of human character, developed my own powers, and mastered the resources of others. What expedient in negotiation is unknown to me? What degree of endurance have I not calculated? What play of the countenance have I not observed? Yes, among my creditors I have disciplined that diplomatic ability that shall some day confound and control cabinets. Oh, my debts, I feel your presence like that of guardian angels! If I be lazy you prick me to action; if elate you subdue me to reflection; and thus it is that you alone can secure that continuous yet controlled energy which conquers mankind.

But Fakredeem's tormentors were also, to some extent, his victims. He had been plundered by every usurer in the Levant, but in turn had taken them in. We may be pretty certain that Disraeli also was no mere pigeon, and managed somehow to convince his creditors that their interest lay in keeping him going. A final quotation from *Tancred* illustrates another side of this curious matter :

The usurers of Syria are as adroit and callous as those of all other countries, and possess, no doubt, all those repulsive qualities which are the consequence of an habitual control over every generous emotion. But instead of viewing them with feelings of vengeance or abhorrence, Fakredeem studied them unceasingly with a fine and profound investigation, and found in their society a deep psychological interest. His own rapacious soul delighted to struggle with their rapine, and it charmed him to baffle with his artifice their fraudulent dexterity.

"Does not the reader," asks Dr. Brandes, "see Disraeli's own character in this description?" The opinion of a Jewish critic on a Jewish statesman cannot be ignored. Every race differs as to the point of honour; each has its own conception of the fitting and beautiful. To the European many a Japanese hero marvellously resembles a treacherous scoundrel, and many a Moslem saint must appear a ferocious sensualist. Disraeli was himself singularly free from the faults of Shylock. But he understood Shylock, and had none of the Gentile resentment of Shylock. It was a fair battle of wits between moneylender and spendthrift, and Disraeli felt no more malice against the usurers who had alternately accommodated and mulcted him, who at one time threatened to destroy him, and from whose toils he finally contrived to slip, than a Christian knight would have felt towards the foe he had overcome in honourable combat.

Venetia followed swiftly on *Henrietta Temple*, and was also written under the spur of debt. Mr. Monypenny prints a letter which tells how, while Disraeli was racing through the last pages, the forms and faces of duns mingled in his mind with the "radiant countenance" of his heroine. Though bearing signs of stress and strain, the book is not uninteresting. Not in the narrower sense political, it is decidedly tendencious, and in the two leading characters are to be recognised the figures of Byron and Shelley, the prophets respectively of militant and humanitarian democracy. In 1837 it required no little courage for a newly-elected member of the Carlton Club, with the antecedents of Disraeli, to honour two characters so suspicious. Byron was, of course, then a fashion of youth, and for yielding to it even a duke's son might be pardoned, for Byron, after all, was a lord as well as a Radical, and, if a sinner, was as gentlemanly as the Father of sin. But Shelley was altogether beyond the pale; even the Whigs could only offer apology, and, with Macaulay, admit that many of

his ideas were both "pernicious and absurd." Disraeli, however, honours both poets without stint, and observes no restraint beyond that imposed by his own critical judgment. Himself a man of action, he naturally makes Byron, as Cadurcis, the more sympathetic and convincing figure; Shelley, as Marmion Herbert, is relatively unreal, yet it may be said that the author went far towards anticipating Arnold's judgment of the "beautiful but ineffectual angel." There is rare discrimination in his hint, given towards the end of the novel, that Shelley died young enough, and Byron too young, for reputation's sake. For while Shelley could only have become more and more vaporous with time, another ten or twenty years might have enabled Byron to conquer his boyish egotism, reveal the real stuff there was in him, and turn his manly qualities to the service of mankind.

Venetia was not a popular success, though it was praised in the *Athenæum* and noticed by the *Edinburgh Review*, which had so far declined to recognise Disraeli's literary existence. But within a few weeks the author had more important things to occupy his mind than the publisher's royalty returns. On June 20, 1837, the old King died, and as in those days the demise of the Crown carried with it a dissolution of Parliament the country was plunged into the excitement of a General Election. Disraeli's rising importance was attested by the offer of a choice of several constituencies, of which the most promising on all grounds was Maidstone. That very corrupt borough then returned two Members, and one of its late representatives was a Mr. Wyndham Lewis, with whom Disraeli was on terms of some intimacy. Five years before he had met Mrs. Lewis at Bulwer's, and had described her as "a pretty little woman" of unequalled volubility. "I have no doubt about it," he said dryly when she expressed her preference for "silent melancholy men." This "flirt and rattle" claimed him as a frequent guest at her husband's

dinner parties, which he found dull, but, fortunately for himself, tolerated with a philosophy he did not always extend to ungifted hospitality.

Wyndham Lewis now suggested him as a colleague. The seat was esteemed safe, but Disraeli took no risks. His address, short and orthodox, did no more than declare his loyalty to the Church, his devotion to the farmer, and his affection—the affection of the grandson of a Jewish immigrant—for the “ancient Constitution which was once the boast of our fathers.”

Platitudes, however, could not long content him, and within a few days he was vigorously attacking the “new Poor Law,” which the Whigs had passed with the assent of the Tory leaders, as a moral crime, a political blunder, and an advertisement to the world that poverty was punished in England as a misdemeanour. To this question he was to return in later years, though he was never able to carry his party with him. A very human person, looking on the condition of the English poor without the dull acquiescence of the native, he had something of that astonished indignation which inspired Dickens. The first reformed House of Commons, which had freed the West Indian negroes, had made a slave of the white pauper. Under the old Elizabethan law poverty had been recognised as a misfortune, for which, as Chief Justice Hale put it, relief should be given for love of God and one’s neighbour, and also because poverty weakened the fibre of men. A man might be helped, and still remain free and undisgraced. It was reserved for the liberal and emancipating nineteenth century to put a brand on the destitute, to shut them up in “Bastilles,” and deprive them of the rights of citizens. Disraeli seems to have stood alone among politicians in realising that the new Poor Law was not only cruel but dangerous, as tending to a loss of national solidarity. Later generations have, while striving to mitigate the hardships of the poor, only accentuated the cleavage between classes, and the wisdom of Disraeli’s views on this and kindred questions has yet to be recognised by statesmen.

At the last moment a certain Colonel Perronet Thompson, editor of the Radical *Westminster Review*, appeared in opposition to Lewis and Disraeli. This person was rude enough to emphasise the foreignness of Disraeli's name: "Mr. Disraeli—I hope I pronounce his name aright." In his next speech Disraeli made a point of referring to "Colonel Perronet Thompson—I hope I pronounce his name aright." The efforts to discredit the candidate as a renegade Radical and an alien—he was greeted on nomination day by cries of "Shylock" and "Old Clo'"—were unsuccessful. Lewis headed the poll; Disraeli was a good second. At thirty-three he had realised the first of his political ambitions, and the hardest fight, possibly, of his whole career had ended victoriously. Maidstone had given him, with much hope, present security. His creditors were now more patient and polite to one who enjoyed the immunities of a Member of Parliament. The wife of his colleague, hitherto a pleasant acquaintance, had improved into a firm ally. He could look forward, though the *Spectator* told its public that he would be little more than a buffoon in Parliament, to a fair chance of being something of what nature and self-education qualified him to be.

On November 13, 1837, he left his father's house at Bradenham to take his seat.

CHAPTER V

"**N**OBODY looked at me, and I was not at all uncomfortable, but voted in the majority with the utmost sang-froid." So wrote Disraeli to his sister concerning almost his earliest division. It concerned what he called "the Jew question." It was proposed to extend to his unconverted brethren the privilege accorded to Quakers of holding municipal office without taking the usual oath. As the Instruction to this effect was defeated by sixteen votes only, the new Member could have gone into the other lobby without attracting unpleasant remark, but now, as on more important occasions, he adopted a discretion which some critics have stigmatised as pusillanimous.

In fact, the discretion may have been literally discretion. "There are very few Englishmen of what is commonly called the Jewish faith," Disraeli wrote some fifteen years later, and probably it seemed of small importance to him whether those few should or should not be free to seek municipal office, or even to exercise the Parliamentary franchise. With the cry of "Old Clo'" still ringing in his ears, he may even have felt that it was not to the best interests of the race that Jews should unnecessarily court public attention. He had little of that belief in "emancipation" which distinguished so many nineteenth-century men and twentieth-century women, and, thinking as he did, his want of enthusiasm for the removal of the civil disabilities of his people cannot justly be set to his discredit. Even to-day the Jewish vote is of small importance except in a very few constituencies; and the influence of the Rothschilds has never been expressed in the fact that one of its members may sit in the House of Lords and another in the House of Commons. The gigantic

power of the Jews in Germany under the Hohenzollern Empire was not lessened by the exclusion of members of the race from many positions of dignity and honour. *Alroy* shows what high ambitions Disraeli entertained on behalf of his people, but he may well have calculated that the dream of a world-wide Jewish Empire would not be advanced, but might even be delayed, by Bills and Instructions to Committee such as were promoted by Grote, Macaulay, and others. On such a subject he would not argue in the English fashion ; he brought to it the more tortuous but more realistic logic of the Oriental. Finally, as the descendant of *Nuevos*, who had long enjoyed high privileges by a nominal conformity, he may have reflected that for the Hebrew who wanted to gratify ambitions, either personal or unselfish, a few drops of baptismal water were no great price to pay. It was one of his favourite theses that, while the racial purity of the Jew was of the utmost moment, the theological tenets which he held were of quite minor importance. He seems, in fact, to have been rather more proud of the concealed and Christianised Israelite than of him who clung to his faith. His full contempt, it is true, was reserved for the Jew who affected to despise Jews ; but he was as innocent of theological narrowness as he was racially exclusive. "His explanation of Christianity," says Dr. Brandes, "changed it into Judaism." Politically his bent was somewhat similar. He was more inclined to bring the Christian voter down to the political powerlessness of the Jewish non-voter than to raise the latter.

A day or two after this mute vote Disraeli for the first time broke silence in the House. It is an oft-told story, but doubt still exists whether his maiden speech was a brilliant effort brought to naught by malice or an absurd exhibition of vanity which earned its merited punishment. O'Connell had been speaking on Ireland, and Disraeli rose to administer that castigation which he had promised at the time of the Taunton election.

He had threatened dreadful things when they "met at Philippi." The time had now come to make good these breathings of vengeance. But, unfortunately for Disraeli, it was nobody's business in particular to further his retaliatory plans. He was still of no special importance. He represented no estate, no family, no interest. He was merely, to the general mass of the Conservative Members, a rather bumptious and ridiculously dressed back-bencher. On the other hand, it was a very special interest and pleasure on the part of O'Connell's followers to insult, and if possible, to ruin him. So the moment he referred to the Irish chief the air was thick with cat-calls and shouts of mocking laughter. The Radicals, who had never forgiven the apostate, joined the chorus of ridicule. The Whigs added a titter of high-bred malice. Even the Tories found something absurd in the style and appearance of their spokesman, and though Peel took pains to cheer his follower, and was imitated by a dutiful minority, there were more scoffs than cheers from the nominally friendly benches.

And for all this there was some excuse. It was not easy to preserve gravity in the presence of an orator whose gesture was so abundant, whose literary mannerisms were so pronounced, whose dress was so remarkable. Exuberant as was the fashion of the time, there was something almost monstrous in his affectation. "Bottle-green frockcoat, . . . waistcoat of white, of the Dick Swiveller pattern, the front a network of glittering chains, . . . large fancy-pattern pantaloons, a black tie, above which no shirt collar was visible, . . . coal-black hair, which, combed away from the right temple, fell in bunches of well-oiled ringlets over his left cheek." Such is the description of an eye-witness quoted by Mr. T. P. O'Connor. Conceive this figure in violent motion, with restless hands and supple shoulders, indulging, as his agitation increased, in the characteristic gesticulation of his race, and it is clear that if the Irish laughter was forced that of many true-born Britons, and good Tories at that, was perfectly spontaneous. But the speech itself, though as

ornate as the speaker, does not seem to have been a bad one. In later years many such a speech from the same lips was heard with reverence on one side of the House and with alarm on the other. It is true that, unless the reports lie, Disraeli more than once, in the modern idiom, "asked for it." Mr. O'Connor quotes him as saying "Why should I not have a tale to unfold to-night?"—a possible, if not a judicious, thing to say. Mr. Monypenny renders the sentence as: "Why should not I, too, have a tail, if it be only for a single night?" If this almost incredible interpretation were generally accepted on the night it may be readily understood why the succeeding laughter was "loud and general." Hansard throws no light on the matter. The mysterious sentence is altogether omitted.

Probably the want of modesty in the speaker told heavily against this first effort. Like his clothes, it was overdone. It was too consciously clever, as they were too consciously wonderful. It was too thickly studded with little jewels of diction, as his waistcoat was too lavishly adorned with little chains of gold. But, on the other hand, his pluck, good-humoured self-command, and tenacity should have commanded respect from a fair-minded audience, and the last words of the baffled speaker showed a spirit which was not to be mistaken. "I have begun several times many things, and I have often succeeded at last. Ay, Sir, and though I sit down now"—this in a voice of exceeding loudness, the mouth stretched to its utmost limits—"the time will come when you will hear me." The words sound like a biographer's invention, but it is quite certain that they were used.

For the rest of the evening he sat with arms folded, gloom and mortification on his brow; but to his sister he put on a brave front, talked of his "undaunted pluck" and "unruffled temper," boasted that he had made "good isolated hits," reported that Peel had sent him a friendly message through Chandos, and signed himself "Yours in Very Good Spirits." Stanley, who had spoken immediately after him, rather ungenerously

ignored the incident, but Campbell offered him an apology on behalf of the Front Bench Whigs, and a few days later Sheil, the most chivalrous of Irish adversaries, while congratulating him on his courage and his command of language, gave him some excellent advice. "Forget your genius for awhile ; be dull and statistical ; never present a perfect argument ; strive to repress a fine phrase."

It was a sage counsel. The House of Commons, then as now, was in the main a collection of mediocrities very jealous of its privileges as a high court of judgment. It took, then as now, a positive pleasure in assailing any reputation made outside its walls, and, in default of due humility on the part of the snubbed newcomer, it persisted in its hostility. On the other hand, it was almost foolishly ready to embrace the offender who should take his punishment good-humouredly. Disraeli, deferring to this foible, won his reward. The next time he rose—it was only seven days later—he was regarded with much curiosity. How would he conduct himself ? Would he show himself sulky, resentful, plaintive, or savage ? Would he scold, or scream, or grovel ? The interest was by this time not unkindly. Even O'Connell, having dealt his blow, was in no mood to go farther ; and the rest of the House felt that some amends were due to one who was, after all, a person of some distinction and, however affected, a man of ability.

Disraeli took Sheil's advice to the letter. His speech was short, and his phrasing simple. He perfectly understood the subject, which was that of copyright. Making no allusion to his late misfortune, he contrived, on this non-party matter, to pay a pleasant little compliment to the Whigs, and when he sat down the victory was his. Indeed the conspiracy designed to ruin him proved, as matters turned out, a considerable asset. It had given him a fine advertisement, and now that he had shown that he could be both sensible and modest the more intelligent Members began to remember that failure in a maiden speech is generally due to an excess

of ideas rather than to their deficiency. A dull man rarely makes a grave mistake on such occasions. A very intelligent man courts failure because he will not content himself with mere platitude and the easy phrase, and his uneasiness leads him to appear ridiculous even when he is really talking excellent sense in good form. Peel, at any rate, seems not to have been misled. But while he realised the ability of his new follower he was in error in supposing, as he seems to have done, that Disraeli was specially devoted to himself—which, as Mr. Stirling Taylor says in his *Modern English Statesmen*, "only showed what a dull fellow Sir Robert was."

A word may be added here as to the attitude of Disraeli to this copyright question. To the end of his career his warm sympathy with men of letters contrasted pleasantly with the attitude of his political contemporaries. He took the very un-English view that the intellectual standing of a country is no less important than its material advance, and was all for the active encouragement of letters by the State. Still more did he interest himself in the protection of literary property, which the unimaginative mind of the average Whig or Tory politician had always tended to regard as far less worthy of consideration than a corkscrew or a button-hook. It may or may not be accounted strange that Macaulay, another literary politician, took the other side. Macaulay, who owed his very pleasant position to his value to the Whigs as a literary bravo, ever ready to employ his great abilities for the slandering of opponents and the whitewashing of associates, could never say anything uncharitable enough about professional men of letters who were his superiors in honesty and independence. All writers in Macaulay's view belonged to Grub Street, except such as were fit to be received, as well-paid amateurs, at Holland House, and though he made very many thousands from his pen he regarded literature as a livelihood with a scorn that was, in the circumstances, preposterous. "The thought of becoming a bookseller's hack," he wrote in 1833, "of spurring a jaded fancy to reluctant exertion, of filling

sheets with trash merely that sheets may be filled, of bearing from publishers and editors what Dryden bore from Tonson and what Mackintosh bore from Lardner, is horrible to me." It never seems to have struck Macaulay that the only difference between himself and the poorest hack who wrote for Bolingbroke or Godolphin was the difference between a comfortably kept woman and one so unfortunate as to have to sell herself inexpensively. A man so viewing the literary career even when pursued honestly, contemptuous of Johnson no less than of Steele, and over-respectful of Addison because he got place and profit on the large scale, should have been the more ready to secure the wretched author he pitied a treatment reasonably approximating to that of other owners of property. But the famous Whig historian, with his usual materialism and illiberality, opposed and succeeded in defeating for a time any attempt to place the literary worker on something like a level with any other kind of producer. Macaulay, taking the view that no gentleman should write for the booksellers, because any gentleman who could write well enough, and stood out for his price, would find himself well paid otherwise, was contemptuous of property in books. Disraeli, on the other hand, had subsisted on his pen, and had known what it was to await a publisher's remittance with the eagerness of a lover watching for the rise of the moon, and when such trifles ceased to interest him personally he did not forget his less fortunate fellow-craftsmen. Hence the affection in which he was held by many literary men who cared nothing for his politics, and to this partiality is perhaps due something of the constant rise in his posthumous reputation. The writer, after all, has the last word, and the writer who is disinterested outlasts him who is venal. Mr. Gladstone was fortunate in having for his official biographer the most finished literary man of the day. But as time goes on the late Lord Morley's panegyric will be more and more heavily discounted, while in all probability the immense and increasing mass of Disraelian literature will some day

attract a man of genius who, perhaps, may first fall in love with the subject on account of his sympathetic attitude to letters.

In such a summary as this little space need be given to the events of the next few years. While in opposition Disraeli contrived to be a quite tractable Conservative. When the main business is to throw stones a party leader is not likely to be particular whether an occasional half-brick is included ; and if Disraeli's line of attack was not always conventional the eccentricity was either unnoticed or readily forgiven. Meanwhile his social talents told. Men who had actively disliked him could not remain insensible to his charm when they got to close quarters in the smoking-room, and even the Irish forgave him over the bottle. Unless you were a very special kind of person he was indeed a man not easy to dislike, and he was not at all a man to pass over in a crowd. Trust came more tardily than affection, and it was long before he ceased to be regarded with a certain suspicion.

The debates in which he joined were for the most part on subjects long forgotten, but one or two of his early speeches deserve to be distinguished. In a discussion on Lord John Russell's Bill to make a grant for elementary education and to subject the aided schools to Governmental inspection and control, both Gladstone and Disraeli intervened. The former opposed in the interests of the Established Church, Disraeli on the ground that while he believed education should be general he did not think it should be in the hands of the State. The State, he said, immured old age in the workhouses on the plea of relieving destitution ; it would tyrannise in the nursery on the plea of giving instruction. Its real object was to break young wills to "implicit obedience," with the inevitable result that "all would be thrown into the same mint and all would come out with the same impress and superscription." He protested that this idea of State education,

borrowed from China and Prussia, must alter English character for the worse. They are many, no doubt, who would still say he was wrong, but full experience of the State's dealings with the children has undoubtedly increased the number who share his opinion.

In the same year—1839—he made a somewhat remarkable speech on Chartism. Both parties treated Chartism as something either to be cheated or repressed. It lay altogether outside the formal politics of the period. Some of its watchwords, indeed, were derived from the democratic Radicalism, marvellously like old Toryism, of the Cobbett school ; but it had no affinity whatever with the newer Radicalism, which was essentially middle class and had for its leading lights men like Grote, the historian of Greece, and John Stuart Mill, philosopher, feminist, and logician. It was intensely hostile, also, to that other group of politicians which, with Charles Villiers as its first prophet, was preaching Free Trade as the universal panacea. The movement really had no leaders. Some of the men who took part in it—Jones, Williams, Frost, and others—were punished because they stood a half inch higher than the mob ; but Chartism was in the main an inarticulate and instinctive rising of the mass. Leaders were sought, and it is curious that it was at first to the aristocracy that the Chartists looked for the man who should plead their cause. They were misled into thinking that the Earl of Durham was the peer for the part, and finally they took as their commander-in-chief one Feargus O'Connor, whose claim to noble lineage seems to have been his chief recommendation.

Chartism, in Disraeli's opinion, should have received Tory sympathy, and might well have been given Tory guidance. Manhood suffrage, ballot, payment of Members, and so forth might seem to threaten the landed interest, but Disraeli held that since 1832 power had already passed from the owners of the soil. He saw in fact that there were but two choices open to the landlords. They might throw in their lot with the insurgent people, or they might make a bargain with

the manufacturers and shop-keepers to co-operate in keeping the lower orders in submission and, if possible, in good humour. Disraeli saw clearly that the angry discontent of the working man was less with the old masters than with the new. It might be a choice of evils for the squires, but the evil of alliance with the working class he felt to be, in the interest of the squires as well as of the nation, less than that of a surrender to the Manchester school. His view was disregarded. The Conservative Party made its choice. Chartism perished. Free Trade triumphed. Until the day before yesterday it was madness and almost treason to suggest that everything did not happen for the best. The Chartists figure in the history commonly written as mere sedition-mongers. The Manchester school is credited not only with its real virtues—a narrow sincerity and unafraid logic—but with a moral dignity it never possessed. To-day, when, though we can all still honour much in Cobden's manly character, many have lost faith in the universal efficacy of his formula; to-day, when many think of Bright less as a Christian saint than as a very hard-fisted man of business, glorying in the slavery of children, measuring national prosperity by trade figures, tolerant of conditions involving human degradation so long as they showed a money profit, Disraeli's views as expressed in the 'thirties suggest a man very much in advance of the thought of his time. While most of his enlightened contemporaries could see nothing but benefit to the State from the growth of an industrial plutocracy, he perceived possibilities of danger:

Great duties could alone confer great station, and the new class which had been invested with political station had not been bound up with the great mass of the people by the exercise of social duties. Those who thus possessed power without discharging its conditions and duties were naturally anxious to put themselves to the least possible expense and trouble. Having gained that object, for which others were content to sacrifice trouble and expense, they were anxious to keep it without any appeal to their pocket, and without any cost of their time.

In other words, he realised that the new rich, without a vestige of the tradition of responsibility which had partially grown up since the last great pillage at the time of the Reformation, would by their close attention to business soon complete that process, which he had already noted, of alienating the masses from the rest of the nation. Already the Reform Act had done much in that direction. He looked on Chartism as analogous to the Pilgrimage of Grace and the rebellion of Ket. All came alike from the disturbance of old order, and from the transfer of wealth and influence from men who, though partly corrupt, were not ungenerous or without a sense of social obligation, to others who would simply use influence to create riches, and riches to buy new influence. In Tudor times More saw sheep eating men. In early Victorian times Disraeli as clearly saw coal-pits and cotton looms as devourers of the people.

For his defence of the Chartist—he expressly disavowed defence of the Charter—Disraeli was branded by a Whig Under-Secretary as “an advocate of riot and confusion.” He got no compensatory support from his own side. Peel had once pleaded for “an entrance channel for the broadest principle of popular representation,” but he was far too cautious to dig the first sod, and he was probably already leaning in private to the specific—the remission of the Corn Laws—which he ultimately adopted.

On this problem, also, Disraeli made a notable speech early in his Parliamentary career. His defence of Protectionism was forcible and clever enough to bring him a remarkable tribute from outside the ranks of his own party. Russell, whom he had counted a natural enemy, allowed a message of congratulation to reach him, and Disraeli, ever sensitive to appreciation and even to its grosser form of flattery,—“I am inordinately vain and delight in praise,” he once confided to Lady Lamington,—thenceforth took a much more favourable view of the Whig leader’s character and capacity. Lord John, whom in the Runnymede letters he had called an insect, now grew in his eyes, and by the time

he wrote the *Life of Lord George Bentinck* was fully visible as a statesman, ill used and misunderstood. The Tories were of course enthusiastic, and when Disraeli had finished trouncing Villiers and reviling Adam Smith his hand was wrung by many a Hardcastle and Western. "They were so grateful," he wrote to his sister, "and well they might be, for certainly they had nothing to say for themselves."¹

On other questions he could hardly have been so popular. In a division on a measure granting the corporation of Birmingham power to establish a police force to cope with the Chartists he marched boldly into the "No" lobby with a couple of democratic Radicals against the whole of the rest of the House. Such an eccentricity, however, could be pardoned in one who had so well proved himself the friend of the fat-cattle party and the defender of the gentlemen of England. The latter had been dumfounded by recent questionings of their dogma that the interests of the landed classes were identical with the interests of the nation. To the facts and arguments of the Free Traders they were unable to oppose much beyond the rhetoric which sufficed for court leet dinners. When, therefore, this astounding son of the Ghetto undertook to prove their position by quotations from List their admiration was considerable. They could not, of course, support him in his fad of countenancing fractious labourers, but after all it was amusing, too, to find that here also he could embarrass the Whigs and annoy the tradesmen.

But still more important than such appreciation in his political stock was the event which now arrived to change the whole tenour of Disraeli's life, and give to his position the substantiality it had so far lacked. Wyndham Lewis, his colleague, died in 1838, and after a year's widowhood Mrs. Lewis accepted Disraeli as a husband. He was then thirty-five; she neared fifty. Her portraits show a woman of, at least, agreeable

¹ Monypenny, vol. ii, p. 24.

appearance, and one feels that the description of her by one Sir William Gregory as "most repulsive—flat, angular, under-bred," was as unjust as it was unkind. The only adjective which might be accepted is the last. Lady Beaconsfield was not a woman of the highest breeding; but an under-bred woman, like an under-bred dog, is not always the worst or the least faithful, or, for that matter, the least amusing. Disraeli found in his marriage complete comfort and happiness. It was not, of course, a match of sentiment on his side, though he conducted the courtship with a colourable imitation of passion, and often, indeed—to judge from the extravagance of his letters—found all his ardour necessary to conquer occasional doubts on the lady's part. She was under little illusion as to herself, and still less as to her lover; she knew he wanted her for her money. Disraeli, on his side, tried to pretend that money in such a limited sense was not an object, though it might be a necessity if he were to marry. Hence a mass of correspondence which, it must be confessed, shows the wooer in a slightly ridiculous light. The stake in the country for which Disraeli married was not so large as many supposed, and it does not seem to have been so large as he himself imagined when he made the first advances. For many years he was still to support a heavy load of debt, but the nightmare of the sponging-house vanished at the altar. His escape was the happier because matters financial had at last approached a definite crisis. There was hardly a shot left in Disraeli's locker when Mrs. Lewis's few thousands a year—she enjoyed only a life interest—enabled him to look the world serenely in the face. Disraeli was better than his bargain. One of the most amiable features of a generally amiable character was his capacity for gratitude. He never forgot a good turn, though he often scorned to remember a bad one, and the woman who had given him safety he repaid by a steadfast and grateful loyalty which gradually ripened into the warmest affection. If he were an excellent husband she in her turn was a perfect wife. In almost every particular she was fitted

to be his complement. Of sturdy West Country yeoman stock, she made up in sound sense what she lacked in depth of intellect, and without being clever herself she had enough appreciation of genius to value properly the man whom she might, without such sense of proportion, have scorned as a mere fortune-hunter. Nor was the relation between them of that sedately dull kind that one might imagine inevitable to such an alliance. As a lover Disraeli's natural skill had improved by considerable experience, and he held it part of his contract to be a lover as well as a husband. When we recall the Corisandes, Zenobias, Alcestes, and Schirenes of his novels we may smile to find him paying extravagant tribute to his Mary Anne. But that she really gained the power to charm him, just as he won her heart without being able to deceive her shrewd commonsense, is attested by a thousand evidences, and their marriage, becoming more perfect with every month of the thirty odd years it endured, was a fact none the less splendid because it had something of the element of comedy. Unquestionably Mrs. Disraeli deserved the tribute her husband paid to her on the dedication page of *Sybil*—"a perfect wife." Disraeli may have begun his suit in a mean spirit; it is highly characteristic of him that he ended better than men of much more lofty pretensions. In fact, when we think of the long years during which the Jewish adventurer struggled, with no more potent weapon than his pen, against accumulating debts and difficulties, we must, while deploring some insincerities which his enemies have unduly magnified, feel amazement that so high a standard of integrity could be maintained. The man who might at any moment be cast into a debtor's prison would not sell his essential self. He would not sponge on his friends. He would not plunder his father. Small indelicacies, trucklings, stratagems, tergiversations, and fawnings there had been, but no great surrender. He could still call his soul his own, if not his politics; and now, with the superiority to fortune which his marriage gave him, he was less than ever inclined to the

industrious meanness which he has so happily satirised in his analysis of the twelve-hundred-a-year mind :

It is a peculiar class that ; £1,200 per annum paid quarterly, is their idea of political science and human nature. To receive £1,200 per annum is government ; to try to receive £1,200 per annum is opposition ; to wish to receive £1,200 per annum is ambition. If a man wants to get into Parliament, and does not want £1,200 per annum, they look upon him as daft ; as a benighted being. They stare in each other's face and ask, " What can —— want to get into Parliament for ? " . . . They have as much idea of fame or celebrity, even of the masculine impulse of an honourable pride, as eunuchs of manly joys.

His new independence was soon to be illustrated. In 1841 the Whig Government fell, after enjoying a short respite by sheltering at a critical moment behind the petticoats of the ladies of the Queen's bedchamber. Defeated on a vote of confidence, Ministers dissolved, and the ensuing election at last gave Peel his majority. Disraeli, having apparently found Maidstone too expensive, stood for Shrewsbury, and was successful. A few weeks later, when Peel was forming his Ministry, he received two letters by the same post. One was from Disraeli, the other from Disraeli's wife. Both bore the same burden. They hinted at a recognition for services rendered, or, in less delicate language, a place in the Government. Somewhat coldly Sir Robert intimated his regret that he had nothing to offer. Brilliance, apparently, was well enough on the back Opposition benches, but dangerous in a Cabinet Minister. All that was in Peel's character. " He disliked Canning," says a writer in the *Quarterly Review* ; " he distrusted Palmerston ; he never appreciated Disraeli ; he misunderstood Gladstone." The minds with which he preferred to co-operate were the practical, matter-of-fact minds of Wellington or Sir James Graham. Peel, as we have seen, had early marked Disraeli as a clever man in his way, but he seems never to have had an idea that the man who wanted to serve and ended by destroying him was a genius. Such want of perception is no great mystery ;

Peel was a very ordinary, Disraeli a very extraordinary man, and while the extraordinary mind can always appreciate the qualities of the ordinary mind the converse is not true. So Peel left Disraeli on the back benches, thinking, good easy man, that he would merely rail in the smoking-room like any other disappointed nobody, and then awoke one night to find himself flung to political perdition by one whom he could have attached to himself for ever by a present Under-Secretaryship with the implied promise of a Cabinet post. He had offended the pride of a great intellect, and there are few more deadly mistakes a middling intellect can make.

For a time, however, Disraeli ostensibly remained what he had professed himself at Shrewsbury, the "humble but fervent" supporter of the Conservative chief. The new Parliament was what he called it in *Endymion*, a "political economy Parliament," and, as Lady Montfort remarked in that novel, "finance and commerce are everybody's subjects." Disraeli, indeed, was to prove himself on one occasion equal to an argumentative battle with Ricardo, dullest of all dull exponents of the dismal science, but in this department he could not hope to be even *primus inter pares*; there would always be some pedantic bagman or inspired cotton-spinner able to trip him up in his facts and figures. In foreign affairs it was different; that field he could have much to himself; he knew that while most Parliamentarians had prejudices, few had even the elementary knowledge necessary to intervene with credit in debate. "I want to see you give your mind to foreign affairs," said Lady Montfort to Endymion; "there, you will have no rival." There in fact Endymion's creator had but one rival—Palmerston, who, if he had never read a book and spoke like a justice of the peace, possessed shrewdness and character, knew how to make himself feared, and was in all ways a foeman worthy of the most ambitious private Member's steel.

"You are one of the few who have broken lances with

Palmerston and rode away in triumph," Lord Eliot, the then Chief Secretary for Ireland, said to Disraeli, according to a letter to Mrs. Disraeli in 1842.¹ That the compliment was translated is evident from the faulty grammar, so characteristic of Beaconsfield, but of its substantial authenticity there is no doubt, for the speech in question was well received, and Disraeli was generally thought to have had the best of the exchanges. Encouraged to persevere in this particular field, he paid attention to his French, and visited Paris after the Prorogation. There he met a number of leading statesmen and men of letters, had an audience of the King, and with characteristic audacity communicated to Louis Philippe a project for an Anglo-French alliance. *Gallomania* was now long forgotten, while Palmerston, who had once courted the French, was by this time disliked and distrusted in Paris. Disraeli represented to the King that under a Conservative Government improved relations were possible. It was true that Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Secretary, was under the German spell which had been cast by the Romantics of his younger days, but he could, Disraeli suggested, be won over. In fact, Disraeli seems to have conceived the notion that Peel's Government could be influenced, and even directed, so far as concerned foreign policy, by a group of which he aspired to be the leader. His memorandum on the subject² makes it clear that Peel could no longer depend on the agriculturists, and there was a possibility that, if another independent Conservative section could be organised, it would be in a position to sway the Administration. What he had obviously in mind was the Young England Party which was actually established during the next year. His hopes of that combination were, as the event proved, extravagant; but there looked at the time to be some substance behind them. His essays in foreign policy were no

¹ Monypenny, vol. ii, p. 124.

² Published as an appendix to the second volume of the Monypenny biography.

doubt largely inspired by a desire for personal advancement, yet he seems to have been convinced of their essential soundness, and in his memorandum to the French King there is a passage of amazing shrewdness, and one which has application even at the present day :

He perceives that in France the enlightened classes are generally in favour of the English connection but that the great body of the nation is hostile to England. In England, on the contrary, the great body of the people is friendly to France, while the superior classes look to France with no cordiality. Yet there is reason to believe that in neither instance is this hostility the result of the ancient prejudices of the two nations. In England it is habit ; in France it is passion. The reason of the classes in England must therefore be instructed, the vanity of the classes in France must therefore be soothed.

Some qualification must be made. The English people are not precisely friendly to France ; it can only be said that they think better of the French than of most foreigners. But it is true that the chief obstacle to Franco-British friendship is, on the French side, a popular distrust fed by a cheap, chauvinistic, and largely venal press, while on the English side opinion is made by a curious combination of great men with vested prejudices, great usurers with vested interests, and small pedants nursed in the German tradition.

Although the project for an alliance did not mature, relations with France decidedly improved while Aberdeen was at the Foreign Office, and when Palmerston's return seemed imminent some years later the prospect was regarded in France with dismay. At that juncture Disraeli took a highly honourable course. In 1845 he strove, at an interview with Louis Philippe and Guizot, to remove French apprehensions, while at the same time making tactful representations to Palmerston as to the course best calculated, in the light of the knowledge he had gained, to allay French alarm. His examination of the state of Europe had convinced him that good understanding between the two leading nations was of primary importance, and it was a view

from which he never departed. Seeing England and France through eyes free from national prejudice, he was better able than either Frenchmen or Englishmen to assess the common interest of both. So might an Englishman settled in Central America be in a better position than any native to suggest a policy for governing the relations of Honduras with Nicaragua.

It was while Disraeli was in Paris at the end of 1842 that the Young England group began to form itself under his ægis. Apart from himself the most interesting member of the Party was George Sydney Smythe, and the most influential Lord John Manners, the former heir to Lord Strangford, the latter a son of the Duke of Rutland. Smythe is generally assumed to have been the original of Waldenshare in *Endymion*—"the child of whim and the slave of an imagination so freakish and deceptive, that it was always impossible to foretell his course." When an echo of the Oxford Movement reached him as a Cambridge undergraduate he sat at the foot of the man who was afterwards to be known as Father Faber. Waldenshare, we are told, "prayed and fasted," but, from a concurrent addiction to French literature, "his views respecting both Church and State became modified—at least in private." So only could Disraeli imagine it must have been with the most brilliant and promising of his allies—of a brilliance which was futile and of a promise that was not fulfilled. Smythe, in debt and addicted early to drink, derived nothing but good from the association with Disraeli, though his father strongly disapproved of it. Manners, the Lord Henry Sydney of *Coningsby*, was a very different person from this wayward but generous man, in whom, as he himself said, there was "a spice of that genius which borders on madness." Manners "devoted his time and thought, labour, and life to one vast and noble purpose, the elevation of the condition of the great body of the people." But, well meaning as he undoubtedly was, he was also pompous and humourless,

and it is unfortunately impossible to mention his name without immediate recollection of one of the immortal fatuities :

Let wealth and commerce, laws and learning die,
But leave us still our old nobility.

The other leading members of the group in the House of Commons were Baillie Cochrane, a rather arid young Scot, and Ferrand, a Yorkshire squire, Member for Knaresborough, whose talent for abusive language was especially exercised when denouncing manufacturers as slave-drivers.

The ideal of Young England was simply the revival of Old England. It had no more respect for the *status quo* than the fiercest Radical, but, unlike the Radical, it put no faith in emancipation. Its desire was to return to the days of a paternal aristocracy and an ordered society in which duty would be assigned and due security and maintenance assured to the lower orders by their conscientious superiors. Harry Coningsby expresses its temper a good deal better than Lord John Manners could have done :

Let me see authority once more honoured ; a solemn reverence again the habit of our lives ; let me see property acknowledging, as in the days of old faith, that labour is his twin brother, and that the essence of all tenure is the performance of duty.

Like the early French Romantics, the Young Englanders placed their faith in Throne and Altar. But the Stuarts rather than the reigning dynasty were the objects of their Royalist enthusiasm. In *Endymion* it will be remembered Waldenshare actually paid his court to the Duke of Modena, and was disappointed at finding that his highness had no immediate intention of claiming that English throne which was his right. So tepid was their admiration of the illustrious House of Brunswick. With the Anglican compromise in religion, at least as it had subsisted under more than a century of pure Erastianism, they had even less sympathy. They wanted the Church to be Catholic.

Whether they had hopes of England's submission to Rome, or still wilder expectation of Rome spontaneously embracing a Church of England purged of Puritan and Erastian influence, is not clear. But they were for making the monarch, as "the only power that has no class sympathy," the agent in restoring to purity and unselfishness a corrupted aristocracy and reconquering the loyalty and affection of a neglected people, and they looked to a spiritual revival which should make the Church once again "the medium by which the despised and degraded classes assert the native equality of man and vindicate the rights and power of intellect." The party could not be called democratic, since its avowed object was a revival of responsible aristocracy urged to its duty by a strong sovereign and a mighty priesthood. But to the ordinary Conservative of the time its sentiments seemed almost as anarchic and unsettling as those of Chartism itself.

That Disraeli made use of the movement to further his private ambitions is certain. To him it was, to use the argot of our own period, a "stunt" of just the kind for a pushing politician, since it brought him in familiar touch with men of high rank. How far he shared in the animating ideas of Young England is an interesting question. Not impossibly reason took him a considerable part of the road on which they were impelled by sentiment. These young Tories were, indeed, preaching many of the doctrines for which he had been denounced as a mountebank when he first gave them expression on the Wycombe hustings. In their antiquarian enthusiasm he, of course, had no part. He could hardly, as the grandson of a Jewish immigrant, feel romantically about the Stuarts. He could not, as a born Jew, feel in his bones their affection for Mother Church. Whenever he goes back to the past he makes it clear that he has no wish to revive obsolete institutions, but wishes only to regain the essential spirit of the old Toryism. With such qualification, it is probable that he had a quite genuine sympathy with the movement. It was a permanent conviction of his that the first of political

reforms was the restoration to the monarch of many of the powers which had been filched from him under the long Whig domination. He was never tired of talking of the Venetian constitution contemplated in the seventeenth and made effective in the eighteenth century. That constitution he regarded as destroyed by the Reform Act, and, having "no faith in the remedial qualities of a government carried on by a neglected democracy who, for three centuries, have received no education," he looked to a monarch no longer a "Doge" as "the proper leader of the people." His vigorous and masculine intellect had always rejected Rationalism in religion as a contradiction in terms; religion he felt to be a necessary bulwark against mere anarchic materialism, and he was equally convinced that the only religion to combat a purely utilitarian philosophy was a religion sure of itself. Moreover, though he never joined Manners in proclaiming trade a "curse," he did most decisively hold that trade should exist for man and not man for trade.

In short, if Disraeli smiled, as he must often have done, at the enthusiasm of his young associates, he may yet have felt that they were nearer the root of the matter than Whig, Radical, or Conservative. There was, also, one side of Young England that appealed to something other than his calculation. Whatever the Young Englanders were or were not, picturesqueness could not be denied them; and Disraeli loved the picturesque. It was his taste, even more than his intellect, which turned him away from the Utilitarians and Mr. Flummery Flum, which made him detest the Manchester school and Mr. Bright's whiskers, and which gave him his nausea for the formulas and standards that satisfied Macaulay.

CHAPTER VI

IT was written in the book of the ironic fates that Disraeli and Peel should fall out at some time and in some way, though Peel's lack of sagacity unnecessarily antedated the rupture. Two men could hardly have been more incompatible—the one brilliant, humorous, long in vision, thinking on the grandiose scale and detesting small details, of over-opulent imagination and over-florid style, saved only from charlatanism by that touch of the prophetic which is so often found in dubious and so seldom in unimpeachable characters; the other prim, precise, “level-headed,” methodical, seeing everything under his nose and nothing much beyond it, revelling in the minutiae of business, thinking of all things in terms of Parliamentary success or failure, the type of man in whom the middle classes put their trust and under whom they will go contentedly down into the abyss.

If every vestige of Disraeli's constructive statesmanship were destroyed, he would still be remembered for his epigrams, would still be studied for his flashes of insight. Peel was, perhaps, a more solid builder. It is possible to imagine a time when the English sovereign will be no longer Emperor of India, and already little remains of the Berlin Treaty and “Peace with Honour.” But the London “Bobbie,” whose popular name perpetuates that under which Peel was pledged to renounce the powers of evil, does suggest immortality, and Free Trade, even if it were abandoned, would still have left indelible traces on the national character and destiny. Yet, of all that Peel said in a life of wonderful industry and loquacity, nothing is remembered but a single word thrice repeated.

“Register! Register! Register!” The exhortation summarised Peel. He was the politician made

perfect. He loved the mere machinery of politics, quite apart from any purpose for which the machinery might be used. He was not on occasion untouched by the ambition to go down to history as the solver of certain great problems. But to make multitudes of speeches, to write myriads of letters, to manage subordinates, to arrange the business of the House of Commons, to answer critics, fence with or placate adversaries . . . all this he would have preferred of all possible occupations even if there had never been a practical issue involved. So far as in him lay, indeed, he strove to keep the wheels of his Parliamentary mill grinding without grist. He never did anything until forced, and then he surrendered, in perfect array, to superior strength. The love of busy futility, of course, is common to all politicians, and Disraeli as well as another felt satisfaction in being somebody even when there was little definite idea of doing something. But he had small relish for the details which were Peel's joy. He was as much concerned as Peel, for example, in winning elections ; but he could only feel contempt for the politician to whom the machinery of party organisation was not a tiresome necessity but an abiding joy. He would gladly use such a man as Wilson Croker ; he could never have tolerated Croker, after the way of Peel, as the closest of personal friends. Disraeli's sketch of Peel in *Lord George Bentinck* was written long after the emotions of the early 'forties were extinct, and is conceived in terms that suggest magnanimity to a fallen foe. But contempt is none the less apparent. It speaks of a man dexterous because of his timidity, and lucid because he was never profound. For the rest, "his judgment was faultless provided he had not to deal with the future." In other words, as became one sprung from a commercial stock, Peel was eminently a man of business, capable in dealing with the day's affairs, but destitute of that length of view which is the essence of high statesmanship.

It was, however, by slow degrees that the incompatibility between leader and follower declared itself. In

a speech which did not ring with conviction Disraeli had defended the lowered Tariff of 1842. In 1843, when Stanley introduced a Bill which all but abolished the duty on corn from Canada, Disraeli recorded his "silent suffrage" against it. In the interval he had told his constituents that he was no enemy to Free Trade according to his own idea of it, but that he would use all his energies for "the preponderance of the landed interest."

When I talk of the landed interest do not for a moment suppose that I mean merely the preponderance of squires of high degree, that in fact I am thinking only of justices of the peace. My thought wanders further than a lordly tower or a manorial hall. I am looking, in using that phrase, to what I consider the vast majority of the English nation. . . . I am looking to the population of our innumerable villages, to the crowds in our rural towns; aye, and I mean something even more than that by the landed interest—I mean the estate of the poor which, in my opinion, has already been tampered with, dangerously tampered with. . . . I mean by the estate of the poor the estate of the Church, which has before this time secured our liberty, and may, for aught I know, still secure our civilisation.

This was the last occasion on which he made any attempt to defend Peel against the agricultural malcontents. The fact suggests that Disraeli, like most of the Whigs and many of the Conservatives, was hoping for a *modus vivendi* on the Corn Laws, for while he foresaw that their repeal would turn England from an agricultural into an industrial country (with, as he thought, calamitous consequences), he had no wish to commit himself to the existing duties as irreducible. "A peculiar characteristic of the Free Trade School," he had said at Westminster, "is their total neglect of circumstances," but the characteristic was also shared by most Protectionists. Disraeli stood almost alone in holding that there are no principles in economics; but only questions of expediency.

His first open assault on the Conservative Government was not made until late in the session of 1843, and

it had nothing to do with the dominant issue between corn and cotton. Peel had introduced a Coercion Bill for Ireland. Disraeli at once opposed it. Considering the attitude he had assumed on Irish affairs since the quarrel with O'Connell, this choice of an occasion for the breach on which he had now determined may seem surprising, but O'Connell had just started the Repeal movement, which seemed to separate him from any established English party, and Disraeli had also to bear in mind that his Young England associates, with their Catholic and Cavalier leanings, were averse from a policy of the "Hell or Connaught" type. Further, he was doubtless moved by the fact that a Young Ireland Party was being formed, with Smith O'Brien as its Parliamentary leader, matching the group which he himself swayed. A working alliance was within the bounds of possibility, and it would have been foolish to jeopardise this by pursuance of the old grudge against O'Connell. Disraeli did not vote either way on the Coercion Bill, but he spoke of it as futile, declared that Ireland was governed by Britain in a way injurious to both countries, and added the expression of a hope that measures would be taken in time to "put an end to a state of things that is the bane of England and the opprobrium of Europe."

Some few days later, intervening in a debate on the Balkans, he criticised the Government with severity, appearing not for the first or the last time as the champion of the Turks. Ministers were deeply incensed. We find Graham writing to Croker that Disraeli was "unprincipled and disappointed," and was responsible for moving the Young England "puppets":

Disraeli alone is mischievous; and with him I have no desire to keep terms. It would be better for the Party if he were driven into the ranks of our open enemies.¹

Yet before the year was out Disraeli was quietly asking Graham for an appointment for one of his brothers. On this Peel's comment was:

It is a good thing when such a man puts his shabbiness on

¹ *Croker Papers*, vol. iii.

record. He asked me for office himself, and I was not surprised that being refused he became independent and a patriot. But to ask favours after his conduct last session is too bad. However, it is a bridle in his mouth.¹

At the opening of the 1844 session Disraeli was excommunicated. Neither the presence of the bridle nor the absence of the whip, however, availed to reduce him to submission. When Lord John Russell moved for inquiry into the state of Ireland he made a speech which commanded general attention. He asked the House to consider the case of an island inhabited by a dense population in extreme distress, "where there was an Established Church which was not their Church, and a territorial aristocracy, the richest of whom lived in distant capitals":

Thus they had a starving population, an absentee aristocracy, and an alien Church, and in addition the weakest executive in the world. That was the Irish question. What would honourable gentlemen say if they were reading of a country in that position? They would say at once that the remedy was revolution. But the Irish could not have a revolution, because Ireland was connected with another and more powerful country. . . . If the connection with England prevented a revolution, and a revolution were the only remedy, England logically was in the odious position of being the cause of all the misery in Ireland. What, then, was the duty of an English Minister? To effect by his policy all those changes which a revolution would do by force. That was the Irish question in its integrity. . . . With regard to the proposals of the noble Lord (John Russell), if he, or any other hon. Member, came forward with a comprehensive plan which would certainly settle the question of Ireland, no matter what the sacrifice might be, I should support it, though I might afterwards feel it necessary to retire from Parliament, or to place my seat again at the disposal of my constituents.

From this speech two things are clear. Young England had determined to stand by Young Ireland, and Disraeli was ready to make alliance with the Whigs, or, more accurately, with their leader. Probably he had

¹ Parker's *Peel*, vol. iii.

already seen that Young England could not last. He had now nothing to hope from Peel. As to the mere Protectionists, his view of them in 1844 is fairly indicated by a passage from *Coningsby*, published in May of that year, in which he asks whether Conservative principles mean anything higher than "a perpetuation of fiscal arrangements, some of them impolitic, none of them important." But in this novel also is evidence that he wanted to stand well with Russell. After allowing him the virtues of imagination, moral intrepidity, and sagacity, he proceeds :

He is experienced in debate, quick in reply, fertile in resource, takes large views, and frequently compensates for a dry and hesitating manner by the expression of those noble truths that flash across the fancy, and rise spontaneously to the lip, of men of poetic temperament when addressing popular assemblies. If we add to this a private life of dignified repute, the accidents of his birth and rank, which never can be severed from the man, the scion of a great historic family, and born, as it were, to the hereditary service of the State, it is difficult to ascertain at what period, or under what circumstances, the Whig Party have ever possessed, or could obtain, a more efficient leader.

This tribute is the more remarkable because, taken as a whole, *Coningsby* is a strong and carefully meditated condemnation of the Whig system. Take these words of the hero :

The cause for which Hampden died in the field and Sydney on the scaffold was the cause of the Venetian Republic, . . . and a Venetian constitution did govern England from the accession of the House of Hanover until 1832.

Whiggery is constantly represented as the interested rule of an aristocratic caste which had reduced the monarch to the position of a Doge, had plundered and imprisoned the Church, and had appropriated the substance of the poor. It is, however, to be noted that the Whigs are attacked only for their past. Of parties as they existed at the time of writing the Conservative is the most heartily reviled. There is no attractive representative of the followers of Peel and the Duke of

Wellington. Monmouth is sinister, Rigby sinister and contemptible, Tadpole and Taper contemptible merely. It would, perhaps, be unfair to suggest that Disraeli at this time was angling for terms on which to cross the floor of the House with his corporal's guard. But as leader of a diminutive party he was acute enough to see the wisdom of establishing friendly relations amid the regular Opposition. Lord Randolph Churchill imitated him in this as in many other ways, and the Fourth Party would have been far less effective without Irish support. Lord John Russell, however, did not rise to the bait—could not, indeed, recognise it as a bait. At no time did he take Disraeli very seriously, and even twenty years later he could write: "I am told Dizzy expects to be the first President of the British Republic."

Before the end of the session of 1844 Disraeli had carried far the war against his leaders. In May he was supporting Ashley (Lord Shaftesbury) in an effort to limit the hours of "young persons" in factories to ten daily, while Bright, with the support of the Government, was pleading with sonorous and sanctified eloquence for twelve. In June we find him opposing the Government on a question of sugar duties, voting for a preference for sugar grown in the British colonies against sugar grown in slave-holding countries. This proposal was carried in the teeth of the Government. Peel thereupon demanding that the House should rescind its vote, Disraeli for the first time dropped all appearance of civility, and became frankly abusive of the Conservative leader, whom he described, not altogether unjustly, as "menacing his friends and cringing to his opponents." Peel gained the day, but with a narrow majority, and on the morrow the Queen wrote of the incident to the King of the Belgians:

We were really in the greatest possible danger of having a resignation of the Government without knowing to whom to turn, and this from the recklessness of a handful of foolish half-Puseyite, half-Young-England people.

Young England's passion for the Throne was ill requited by its occupant. But it can easily be understood that, though Queen Victoria at a later period listened eagerly enough to the voice of the charmer whom she now condemned, she had no fancy to revive times when, as Lord John Manners wrote :

Haughtiest kings did stoop to kiss the rod
Wielded by some poor minister of God.

Disraeli, of course, could have had no direct knowledge of the royal displeasure, but some instinct seems to have warned him to take an early opportunity of soothing august susceptibilities. At any rate, a change of tone is discernible about this time. In *Coningsby* the Hanoverian dynasty is denounced and derided as a Whig institution ; and in still earlier days when the Queen's affection for her Whig ladies had temporarily delayed the accession of the Conservatives to power, Disraeli had written in a public print an open letter to Her Majesty, courteous in tone, but none the less a lecture. Soon, however, in *Sybil*, he was to sound a new note. Victoria, "fair and serene," is acclaimed as one to whom not only allegiance but affectionate homage is due. Her "sweet and thrilling voice" is associated in a single sentence with her "absorbing sense of august duty." When he wrote this he was evidently thinking some way ahead.

For the moment, however, he might cheerfully have put up with the absence of Court favour if he had but enjoyed the patronage of one or two of the Queen's more powerful subjects. He had been writing grandiloquently about the nation being "saved by its youth." But actually he was finding the want of years in his followers a considerable inconvenience. Manners and Smythe, fervent crusaders, were also more or less dutiful sons, who sat for their fathers' boroughs and could not afford to stand on their fathers' corns. When young men of the upper classes adopt democratic politics the paternal bosom is seldom wrung. Noble mothers may be occasionally distressed by the incursion

of uncouth strangers, but noble sires are generally philosophic enough to recognise that this sort of thing is an intellectual measles, with a practically negligible percentage of mortality, to which any bright young fellow is liable. But it is one thing to profess levelling opinions, and quite another to go to the length of nearly upsetting some Ministry which alone stands between society and the powers of anarchy. The Duke of Rutland and Lord Strangford felt it was time to intervene. They disliked Disraeli; they had no notion of calling their labourers the "order of the peasantry"; they had no intention whatever of re-erecting Maypoles; they were perfectly content with parsons who knew their place; and if they did not understand precisely what was meant by a "Doge," they justly deemed it was not a proper name to apply to the monarch and fountain of honour. It was time to put a stop to a lot of boys' nonsense that was being used, for his own purposes, by a guileful Hebrew.

"It is grievous," wrote his grace of Rutland to his lordship of Strangford, "that two young men like John and Mr. Smythe should be led by one of whose integrity of purpose I have an opinion similar to your own, though I can judge only by his public career. The admirable character of our sons only makes them the more assailable by the arts of a designing person. I will write to John to-morrow." John was written to on the morrow. He did not come at once to heel. Both he and Smythe supported Disraeli at a great Young England meeting at Manchester in the autumn of 1844, and in the next year appeared *Sybil*, which is often described as Young England's manifesto on the problems of the day. But it could almost be better designated as Young England's epitaph, for when it appeared the party had already, for all practical purposes, dissolved. Young aristocracy had discovered that old aristocracy, when it means business, has curiously persuasive arguments. A definite break came when in 1845 Disraeli spoke and voted against the Government grant for the training of Roman Catholic

priests at Maynooth. Disraeli has been accused of invoking against Peel on this occasion two sentiments to which a statesman should be ashamed to appeal—religious hatred and racial animosity. But from end to end of the speech there is in fact no suggestion of “No Popery,” and equally no attempt to raise English feeling against Ireland. The only enemy is Peel. Animosity is just enough restrained, and no more, to give wit its due penetrative power and accuracy of objective. Disraeli’s mockery of the Minister was the more devastating because it was recognisably just:

I never knew the right honourable gentleman bring forward, not what I call a great measure, but a measure which assumes to settle a great controversy—there is a difference—without saying that three courses were open to him. In a certain sense, and looking to his own position, he is right. There is the course the right honourable gentleman has left. There is the course the right honourable gentleman is following; and there is usually the course the right honourable gentleman ought to follow. . . . The right honourable gentleman tells us to go back to precedents; with him a great measure is always founded on a small precedent. He traces the steam engine always back to the tea-kettle.

Still more bitter was the appeal to the Roman Catholic Members to reject the wretched grant:

Who is he who introduces it? It is the same individual whose bleak shade fell on the sunshine of your hopes for more than a quarter of a century. . . . If it were the boon it is said to be, would you accept it from hands polluted?

Finally there is the appeal to the pride of the Whigs:

I should have thought that the noble lord opposite (Russell) was almost weary of being dragged at the triumphal car of a conqueror who did not conquer him in fair fight.

The whole speech may be justly called spiteful and factious, but it had no element of bigotry.

Disraeli’s object was simply to discredit Peel by exposing his inconsistency. Just as the man who was

once Protestant champion was now offering "boons" to Rome, so, "returned to power as the head of the landed interest," he was "moving rapidly towards Cobdenism." In emphasising the significance of the Maynooth business Disraeli was simply building up a general case of inveterate and innate untrustworthiness against Peel. In so doing it may have caused him some little pain to break finally with the three or four young men who had been his allies. They were his first disciples. They were pleasant and honest people. They were—and this was sentimentally important to Disraeli—high-born and gracefully mannered. But after all they were a very small group, they had embarrassing fathers, their ideas were a little wild. Besides, a wider prospect was opening. The discontent of the Tory rank and file was growing daily. For the present it was mainly inarticulate; the grumbling was in the lobbies and not on the floor of the House; but so much the more chance for the man bold enough to say to-day what hundreds might be saying to-morrow. He would have established a claim. Disraeli, quick to see to what Peel's self-education was leading, was now determined to give up all peddling play, and stake everything on the chance of ruining the leader who had neglected him.

Whether, had the case been otherwise, he could ever have made anything of Young England is highly doubtful. If there be such a thing as a *zeitgeist* it must be admitted that the spirit of the Victorian period was dead against the ideals of Smythe and Manners. Some fine minds might reveal bewildered sympathy, but the coarse energies of the age were uniformly hostile. It was a time, as every line of Macaulay attests, when the typical culture was at one with the typical Philistinism in seeking a solution of every political and moral problem in the mere multiplication of wealth. The few who, like Carlyle, protested that the scramble of self-seekers must end in social disruption had nothing very attractive to offer in the place of "anarchy plus

a police constable"; for benevolent despotism of the Prussian type did not, fortunately, attract English imaginations. The romance as well as the prose of the time looked forward rather than backward, and the Virgilian tones of Tennyson, no less than the clipped, precise accents of Mill, proclaimed the coming of a millennium based mainly on a more cunning adjustment of forces and cogwheels. It was well enough to respect the old forms of the Church, and religion could be admired so long as it did not intrude into economics. But it was generally agreed that the soul of man must not be recognised in statecraft, for no one really knew if man had a soul, whereas it was certain that steam would move a piston and that cotton could be sold for good money, in which the poorest would share! Moreover, anybody with a modicum of brains—anybody of what Carlyle called the "beaver intellect"—could go to work and make money; whereas the reconstruction of society wanted thought—more thought than the best English families could give it between the last of fox-hunting and the first of shooting. The ruling classes desired to retain their rule, but it must always be as amateurs, and this was no amateur's job. As to the ruled, they had for some time been convinced though highly respectable anarchists, and the theory that the best form of government is no government had rapidly extended from the middle classes to the politically-minded working man. People in this mood were not likely to listen with respect to the arguments of a few young aristocrats that a world organised on a basis of free contract should return to conditions of fixed status. Further, there was in the Toryism of Smythe, as in the Socialism of William Morris, something that repelled the robust commonsense of the average Englishman, who hates above all things the precious and the pretentious, and has made mere terms of abuse of many harmless adjectives originally indicating a preference for moral or material beauty. A contemporary Young Irelander who was to suffer transportation for his convictions seems to have come pretty near the truth. "A hell of a fellow

is Young England," wrote John Mitchel to a friend, "and has handsome language at command, as also very gentlemanly clothes, and most respectable hats."

If Young England had frankly thrown in its lot with Chartism something, of course, might have happened. In fact nothing did happen. In one sense Dr. Brandes states the fact when he says that the group "never had any influence on the history of England." It left no mark on the Statute book. It produced no definite effect on the course of social development. But it did not wholly perish from the minds of men, and the memory of it served often to remind modern Conservatism of its descent—a considerable descent—from old Toryism. And it certainly brought out the most important and respectable components in that marvellous assemblage of queerly assorted elements whom we call Beaconsfield and Disraeli. As a statesman it is often impossible to think of him but as a comedian playing a part. But in *Coningsby* and *Sybil* he is something more than a clever man or a shrewd man or an eloquent man—he rises to the elevation of the prophet. He could see the present as vividly as Carlyle, but he could also do what to Carlyle was impossible. He could see the past without prejudice and as a whole. Carlyle, according as he worked with the sunlight of his free imagination or by the magnesium glare of the prejudices which enslaved him, could tell picturesque truths or graphic lies concerning certain episodes. But he had not the steady and unbiased vision of Disraeli, who could view three hundred years of English history as the climber of a desolate Alpine peak views three hundred miles of country. No doubt he made endless errors in detail, but he got the general lie of the land simply because he surveyed it from a distance and saw it through the eyes of an outsider concerned only to note broad truths.

Coningsby is still valuable, not only as a guide to history but as a manual of political wisdom. As in Disraeli's work generally, the narrative is tedious. No doubt the author was thankful when he could dismiss

Edith Millbank for a few chapters and settle down to snug discussion of "Venetian Constitution" and "Dutch Finance"; no doubt he groaned heavily when the needs of the story dictated that his hero, after sixty pages or so of close argument and flashing epigram, should relapse into false and stilted rhapsodies. But the thing had to be done. It would have been false pretences in those days to offer the public what purported to be a novel without giving it its bellyful of sentiment and cross-purposes. A foolish convention still compels the lay preacher to present his thoughts—or those at least which he wishes to reach the larger public—in fiction form. But the modern novelist has at least this advantage—that he need not, unless he likes, trouble much about his lovers; still better, he can make his lovers interested, as flesh-and-blood lovers quite commonly are, in things other than themselves. He can talk to his heart's content, without troubling about incident, so long as he talks through half a dozen pairs of lips. Disraeli, unhappily for him and for his readers to-day, was debarred such liberties, and the gems with which his great works abound must be gathered at the expense of much tedium and weary exasperation. But of the fineness of these jewels when found there can be no question. The characters of *Coningsby* are immortal, or at least their life can end only with the disappearance of Parliamentary institutions. Tadpole, whose one idea is to gain the Wesleyan vote, is still ultra-modern, for did not Mr. Lloyd George, when he told a dissenting audience that the spirit of Wesley alone raised the British and American peoples above the lesser breeds of mankind, take a leaf from Tadpole's book? And Taper, though his "political reading was confined to an intimate acquaintance with the Red Book and Beatson's Political Index, which he could repeat backwards," is still an indispensable pillar of representative government. Rigby, too, "who neither felt nor thought, but who possessed in a very remarkable degree a restless instinct for adroit business," is a person without whom no modern Administration is complete. There is no

more singular contrast than that between the wildness of the real Young Englanders and the extraordinary shrewdness with which the philosophy of their position was set forth in the literary testament of the movement. *Coningsby* is full of piercing things. "You may make aristocracies by laws," says the Radical manufacturer, "you can only maintain them by manners." This was said at a time when the old stateliness was still substantially intact, but Disraeli's prophetic eye was not deceived; the lines were already set which were to conduct the great to their present position of political insignificance and almost of social dependence. In Lady Blessington's salon he had a glimpse of the night-clubs of to-day, where the duke dances with the latest adventurer's favourite and fawns on her protector for a Stock Exchange tip. *Coningsby*, in one pregnant sentence, indicates the decline of the old static and aristocratic wealth in competition with that industrial wealth which ever renews itself: "Greatness no longer depends on rentals, the world is too rich; nor on pedigrees, the world is too knowing." Mightily shrewd, also, is the retort on the Whig lord who asks what it signifies whether a man be called a labourer or a peasant? "And what can it signify?" asked his brother-in-law, "whether a man be called Mr. Howard or Lord Everingham?" In the production of flashing dialogue Disraeli was certainly the equal of Mr. Shaw, and it is not mere irrelevant brilliance, but real wit, that is to say, wisdom polished and sharpened. He always means something; his nails go home with one blow. On many occasions he does not seem to have cared very deeply, as a practical matter, whether his adopted land went right or wrong. He would, of course, have preferred it to take the course he thought wisest, but he was resolute not to be set aside as a mere nuisance or visionary, and it could not, indeed, be expected that for a stepmother, not always a kind one, he could have a greater love than that of her real sons, most of whom also dealt not in self-sacrifice. It was enough that what he saw very clearly he said, when he could without

political detriment, very frankly and with the most benevolent interest.

Sybil is a yet more remarkable, though a much less amusing book than *Coningsby*. Perhaps its sub-title, *The Two Nations*, is the most remarkable thing about it :

“Two nations, between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy ; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets ; who are formed by a different breeding and fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.”

“You speak of ——” said Egremont, hesitatingly.

“THE RICH AND THE POOR.”

At the time this must have seemed to many an extravagant paradox ; even towards the close of the nineteenth century it was a dark saying. The gulf between rich and poor was wide and widening, but there was still a vague Christian tradition that had survived the substance of religion, and that sufficed to console the average observer with the thought that while the differences between classes were superficial and transitory, their unity was essential and permanent. Macaulay the Whig, who could not deny that it was the Church which had welded two peoples into one nation, was also able to persuade himself that rationalism could keep them one. Disraeli the Tory, or rather, Disraeli the Jew—for it was his Judaism that told him that without vision the people perish—did not so deceive himself. He realised that rationalism must be rational, and that slavery of all human institutions is perhaps the easiest to defend by logic. In a civilisation founded on mere reason, the highly artificial conception of a fundamental equality transcending all differences of education and circumstance must give way, and society must inevitably relapse into the only two divisions which a purely materialistic philosophy can conceive. That it has so relapsed is the grand fact of to-day. The Two Nations exist ; but there are also two Governments.

The Poor or Serf Nation, now more politely known as Labour, has evolved its own organ—the trade union of which Disraeli writes with a prophetic terror—which is always in concealed or open war with the organ of the Rich, and the public peace subsists only by the uncertain equipoise of the two opposed powers. Disraeli's paradox has in eighty years become a platitude.

Everything of the Young England movement that was worth preserving has been retained in these two novels. Lord Morley declared *Sybil* the "sincerest" of Disraeli's works, and it is certainly that in which he has expressed most clearly the genuine political faith which was in him—a faith most imperfectly translated into his political career. There we find the reaction of a kind heart and a sagacious mind to the awful anarchy of industrialism which to men morally of much higher pretension seemed full of satisfaction for the present and of hope for the future. There we find a mordant note which it is hardly ridiculous to compare with that of Carlyle's best work, his *Chartism* and certain of the *Latter Day Pamphlets*. The affected flippancy with which the author describes the birth and education of the workman Devilsdust is in its way not less powerful than that famous passage concerning the poor sempstress who proved her sisterhood to the great ladies by giving them typhoid fever. "Infanticide," says Disraeli, "is practised as extensively and as legally in England as it is on the banks of the Ganges," but Devilsdust was one of those infants "that will defy even starvation and poison." Sending him out to play in order that he should be run over succeeded no better; "Juggernaut spared him to Moloch"; he lived to be a factory hand and a force in the trade union. This, and much else, is a transcript direct from life. Disraeli had seen what he wrote about, and, having no investments in industrial shares, he could allow himself to hate what he had seen. Most other politicians, who were not too idle or too nice to grope into manufacturing mysteries, drew profit from the human degradation so powerfully described in *Sybil*. The special note of

humanitarian indignation is mainly lacking in *Coningsby*, but it has not a little true passion as well as clear wisdom. The Jewish financier, Sidonia, is introduced for two purposes. In the first place it is he who has to explain England to an Englishman, and very well he does it :

You will observe one curious trait in the history of this country. The depository of power is always unpopular ; all combine against it ; it always falls. Power was deposited in the great barons ; the Church, using the King for its instrument, crushed the great barons. Power was deposited in the Church ; the King, bribing the Parliament, plundered the Church. Power was deposited in the King ; the Parliament, using the people, beheaded the King, expelled the King, changed the King, and, finally, for a King substituted an administrative officer. For one hundred and fifty years power has been deposited in the Parliament, and for the last sixty or seventy years it has been becoming more and more unpopular. . . . It is impossible to resist the impression that this body also is doomed to be destroyed.

Parliament still lives, but that does not prove Sidonia a false prophet. The disrepute into which representative institutions have fallen, a disrepute curiously reaching its height at the moment of "making the world safe for democracy," seems rather to vindicate him. For the rest, Parliament has in one special and very important sense fallen. It is no longer, as it was in Disraeli's time, the dominant power in the State. It is neither the chief governing nor the chief checking power. The governing power is the bureaucracy ; the checking power is society, which in practice means the great financiers, and the people, which in practice means the trade unions. Ministers and permanent officials are not chiefly concerned in asking what Parliament will say ; they make their calculations as to what the classes and the people will stand, or, as regards any unorganised part of the people, what they can stand. "The tendency of advanced civilisation," said Sidonia, "is in truth to pure monarchy" ; elsewhere he says that "man was made to adore and to obey." The monarchy

to which so much progress has been made since his time is certainly monarchy in that it is the negation of representative government. But it is in no sense pure monarchy, and though it gives its subjects plenty of practice in obeying it cannot afford any great satisfaction to those who yearn to adore.

In discussing England Sidonia is a creature of pure intellect. When he begins to talk of the Jewish race he is all lyric fire :

You never observe a great intellectual movement in Europe in which the Jews do not greatly participate. The first Jesuits were Jews ; that mysterious Russian diplomacy which so alarms Western Europe is organised and principally carried on by Jews ; that mighty revolution which is at this moment preparing in Germany, and which will be in fact a second and greater Reformation, and of which so little is as yet known in England, is entirely developing under the auspices of Jews, who almost monopolise the professorial chairs of Germany. . . . Favoured by nature and by nature's God, we produced the lyre of David ; we gave you Isaiah and Ezekiel. . . . What are all the schoolmen, Aquinas himself, to Maimonides ? And as for modern philosophy, all springs from Spinoza. . . . The three great creative minds to whose exquisite inventions all nations at this moment yield, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn, are of Hebrew race ; and little do your men of fashion, your muscadins of Paris and your dandies of London, as they thrill with rapture at the notes of a Pasta or a Grisi, little do they suspect that they are offering their homage to the "sweet singers of Israel."

It should be remembered, in reading the fanfaronade of which this is only a short extract, that Disraeli belonged to the first generation of modern Jews who had been born out of bondage. Wherever the eagles of Napoleon had passed the Jews had received the privilege of citizenship. In every city brought under the sway of the Republic or the Empire, the walls of the Ghetto had been levelled. And, while the Imperial liberator of Israel, turning from his last battle-field, was driving post on the road that led to Paris and Longwood, one Nathan Mayer was speeding towards the one capital

Napoleon had neglected to conquer, there to win a mighty victory for his race, and to become, as the head of the house of Rothschild, what Sidonia is in the romance, the unseen mover of half the strings in Europe. To the Jew it might well seem that two million Gentiles had died mainly for the advantage of his race. "From buffet to buffet, from stripe to stripe," wrote Michelet, "the Jews are mounting to the very throne of the world." To Disraeli the Empire and the rule were of much more moment than the diadem. It was little matter if the Jews still suffered small social and political disabilities, were still unable to become town councillors or Members of Parliament, when they were courted by powerful monarchs and could embarrass any Government which failed in proper respect to the race.

The boasts of Sidonia came from the swelling pride of the first emancipated generation; but there was gratitude mingled with the triumph. Disraeli, the advocate of Anglo-French amity and the apologist of the third Napoleon, was not forgetful of what France and the Bonapartes had done for his people.

CHAPTER VII

TO understand a past transaction, and especially to appreciate the emotions generated by it, the imagination must be forced to strong and continuous effort. Everything that ever occurred tends to seem the only thing that could have occurred. We see, long before the catastrophe, the dagger stretched over Cæsar, the axe ground for Charles, the faggot laid for Joan, the theme prepared for Luther, and we commonly forget that to contemporaries the issue of every great conflict was problematical almost to the point of decision. Such illusion must first be dispelled if we are to understand the coming of Free Trade and its reactions on the fortunes of politicians. Readers of histories written mainly from one standpoint see Free Trade marching steadily to triumph from the publication of the *Wealth of Nations* to the moment that Peel decided on the repeal of the Corn Laws. They imagine the victory as one of light over darkness, of a rational creed over a poisonous superstition. They find in it, in short, something analogous to the success of Christianity at the expense of antique paganism ; and view Peel rather as one of those Early Fathers who, born in the old faith, gradually finds it impossible, is at last compelled by conscience to attack what he once honestly believed, and ends as a martyr for truth.

The actual course of things was very different. There was no general consensus of opinion in favour of Free Trade in the early 'forties. Free Trade was not what people to-day call "practical politics." It was a theory, highly debatable and toughly debated, and to perhaps a majority it was very much like a fad. The case against it was not sustained solely by foolish or interested men. The case for it had the support of a

vast deal of selfishness and some honest stupidity. If the landlords wanted the State to keep up their rents, the manufacturers equally wanted the State to pay part of their wages. If the Protectionist was extravagant in declaiming that the repeal of the Corn Laws meant ruin to the country, the Free Trader was equally extravagant in promising that his remedy would solve every national problem. The position was very much like that of the female suffrage question in 1910 or 1911. The Tory Party was almost solidly opposed to the abolition of the Corn Laws. Nearly all the Whigs whose names are venerated for their liberality were either hostile or indifferent. Lord John Russell was a Protectionist. Macaulay was quite as contemptuous of Cobdenism as Mr. Asquith was of suffragism. Almost the only politician of good social position who could be called a strong and convinced Free Trader was Pelham Villiers. This is not to deny that the movement was a formidable one. It was engineered with a cool skill and energy rare at any time, and especially rare in those days of rudimentary political organisation. It possessed in Cobden an agitator of very unusual intellect and character, and it had a great deal of the new money behind it. It was supported also by a powerful body of urban working-class opinion. It might very conceivably have triumphed at length on its own merits. But it won in 1846 for one reason, and one reason only. It won because Peel, in a dark moment for his fame, decided for the second time to betray his party.

In 1845, far from being seen as something fated and inevitable, Free Trade could not be said to be even in the balance. To speak of the issue as much less a certainty than the result of the next year's Derby would be inadequate to describe the fact. For the next year's Derby at least was almost certain to be run, while for anything people knew Free Trade might in twelve months' time be superseded in public interest by the outbreak of a little war or the discovery of a big gold-mine. Even granting a race, Free Trade was an exceedingly dark horse. Knowing people it is true, had suggested

for some time that Peel had been playing with Cobdenism. People still more knowing went so far as to say that he had always been a Free Trader. Some rumour of all this had reached the squires, and they were a little angry and uneasy, but their mood hardly amounted to suspicion. There are some things fairly honest men cannot bring themselves to believe of men reputed fairly honest, and in view of Peel's past as the head of a strongly Protectionist party, having regard to his oft-expressed pride in leading the "gentlemen of England," Protectionists to a man, it seemed hardly credible that he could in any circumstances consent to give legislative effect to the formulas of the Manchester School.

A change of opinion is not a crime, and it cannot be imputed to Peel that he wronged his party in allowing himself to be converted—if he needed conversion—to the economic views of Cobden. Such an avowal must indeed, in any case, have been disastrous to the Conservatives. But, though it might be deplored, it could not justly be resented; to desertion there would not have been added betrayal. When Peel felt that he could no longer stand for Protection his course was clear. He should have resigned. If it proved impossible for the Government to be carried on for the time being by another Minister then he should have left the question open. In no circumstances should he have consented to use a position given him on the understanding that he was to pursue one line of policy, in order to impose on the country, definitively and irrevocably, a course of policy wholly antagonistic. When the incredible happened Melbourne, in a conversation with the Queen, gave vent to a general sentiment. "Ma'am," he said, with a freedom of language which only his favoured position made safe, "It's a damned dishonest act." The opinion of people who thought like Melbourne was not dependent on their view of the economic issue. The whole matter was assumed to be not one of politics but of elementary honour. It was felt, rather naïvely perhaps, in consideration of

the precedent of Pitt and the Roman Catholics, that a Prime Minister did not break his pledges.

But Disraeli had long assumed, not only that Peel was capable of betrayal, but that he had made up his mind to betray. He spent the whole year 1845 warning the agriculturists that the pass was about to be sold. He was not believed, because belief implied a disloyalty which seemed monstrous, and this decision to trust the leader despite all the evidence of his untrustworthiness explains the strength of the ultimate resentment against Peel and the ease with which Disraeli became accepted as a Conservative leader. The betrayer was never forgiven; the betrayer's exposé had established a claim which was not disregarded even when, in a very short time, he himself gave up the Protectionist cause. The one recantation was a crime, the other a veniality. Peel was like a man who deserts a woman on the day fixed for the wedding; Disraeli like one who quietly lets the affair lapse after a discreet interval of lukewarmness. Or, to vary the metaphor, we may compare the Protectionist Party to a lover robbed of his mistress by a trick. Very commonly he is soon reconciled to his loss, and may bless the treason, but he does not any the more pardon the traitor. It was thus with Free Trade. The angry agriculturists, after a while, found that things were on the whole by no means so bad in their special industry. A great many of them added largely to their wealth by taking advantage of the new industrial opportunities, others benefited richly by the increased price of land in the neighbourhood of new towns. Perhaps a majority were soon converted to the new doctrine; determined opponents were, at any rate, a very small minority; and as the time went on it became almost a solecism to question Cobdenic principles. But the treachery of Peel was never pardoned, and Disraeli's part in predicting and punishing the treachery remained always to his credit.

Throughout 1845 he continually warned the agriculturists that they were to be cozened. In February,

satirising Peel's plagiaristic policy, he amused the House of Commons with a figure which passed at once into the common currency. The right honourable gentleman, he said, had "caught the Whigs bathing, and had walked away with their clothes." Some time before Peel, in denouncing him, had been so injudicious as to quote Canning's lines:

Give me the avowed, the erect, the manly foe.
Firm I can meet, perhaps can turn, the blow;
But of all plagues, good heaven, thy wrath can send,
Save me, oh, save me, from the candid friend.

Peel's relations with Canning had been "ambiguous"; in plainer language, he was generally thought to have treated Canning very badly. Disraeli took cruel advantage of the opening. After complimenting Peel, who was given to pompous quotation, on his success in that art, a success explained "partly because he seldom quoted a passage which had not already received the meed of Parliamentary approbation," he briefly raked up the Canning-Peel past, and ended by exclaiming: "Mr. Canning! and quoted by the right honourable gentleman! The theme, the poet, the speaker—what a felicitous combination!"

The next month, in a speech nominally on agricultural distress, he returned to the attack with fresh charges of inconstancy:

You must not contrast too strongly the hours of courtship and the years of possession. 'Tis very true that the right honourable gentleman's conduct is very different. I remember him making his Protection speeches. They were the best speeches I ever heard. It was a great thing to hear the right honourable gentleman say, "I would rather be the leader of the gentlemen of England than possess the confidence of sovereigns." We don't hear much of "the gentlemen of England" now. But what of that? They have the pleasure of memory—the charms of reminiscence. They were his first love, and though he may not kneel to them now as in the hour of passion, still they can recall the past.

The sarcasm was biting, but it was only a prepara-

tion leading up to the most memorable peroration Disraeli ever made :

Protection appears to be in about the same condition that Protestantism was in 1828. The country will draw its moral. For my part, if we are to have Free Trade, I, who honour genius, prefer that such measures should be proposed by the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Cobden) than by one who, through skilful Parliamentary manœuvres, has tampered with the generous confidence of a great people and of a great party. For myself, I care not what may be the result. Dissolve, if you please, the Parliament you have betrayed, and appeal to the people who, I believe, mistrust you. For me there remains this at least—the opportunity of expressing thus publicly my belief that a Conservative Government is an organised hypocrisy.

According to a contemporary writer in the Press the success of the speech was “unparalleled,” but by Disraeli’s account much of the applause came from the Opposition benches ; the Tories when they cheered did so “with downcast eyes, as if they yet hesitated to give utterance to feelings too long and too painfully suppressed.” The squires in fact behaved as men in their position generally do. They were much like the “ginger” politicians of a later day. Uneasy about Peel, wanting to make him toe a line and come up to a scratch, they inwardly applauded things they would hardly have dared themselves to say ; but, still believing in Peel’s ultimate loyalty, they did not carry their demonstrations to a point which might have disturbed their leader’s confidence. “Practically speaking,” says Disraeli in *Lord George Bentinck*, “the Conservative Government at the end of the Session of ’45 was far stronger than even at the beginning of the Session of ’42.” That is a frank acknowledgment of the failure of his philippics. Despite all that he could advance to show the untrustworthiness of Peel in general, and his unsatisfactory attitude to Free Trade in particular, the Conservatives generally declined to believe that he would sell the pass. Indeed, on the known facts, why should they? Harvests had been

good. The price of wheat had fallen in two years from 60s. to 45s. a quarter. Trade was prosperous. The one industry which was not doing well was agriculture itself. In such circumstances, the Manchester School was "reduced to silence." Even had Peel, the leader of a Protectionist Party, become a Free Trader pure and simple, the time might well have seemed inopportune for an announcement of his conversion.

It soon became, however, evident that Disraeli had reason. By this time Cobden himself was not a more convinced Free Trader than Peel. His natural sympathies, as one sprung himself from trade, were rather with the rising manufacturing and commercial class than with the agricultural interest. His intellect, in its narrowness no less than in its lucidity, was of the kind to be impressed with the one unanswerable argument that Free Trade would increase the wealth of the country. So much was almost self-evident, and a Protectionist could only reply that wealth was not everything, and that the quality of the wealth produced by Free Trade could not make for the ultimate good of the nation. But such an argument could only appeal to a statesman of some imagination, taking a long view. Peel, with no imagination, was incapable of a long view. The conviction that Free Trade meant an increase in the national wealth no doubt decided the whole question in his mind, and Disraeli's divination of his conversion in no sense anticipated but only noted the fact. But with things as they were during the Session of 1845 it was impossible for him to declare for the abolition of the Corn Laws, for, even if he could have carried with him some obedient Conservatives, he would still have had the opposition of the Whigs. As Disraeli guessed, during all those months of baiting, he was only waiting his opportunity.

It came with the autumn. A modern enemy of the Free Trade system reposed his hope of its ruin on "two bad winters." Free Trade has, in fact, survived many

bad winters, but one bad summer sufficed for its establishment. The English harvest of 1845 was spoiled by heavy rains. Such things, however, had happened before, and a single failure of the wheat crop could not in itself be alleged as a sufficient cause for reversing the whole fiscal tradition of the country. Something more sensational was needed. That something was supplied by the "Irish famine." The Irish potato crop had also failed, and the potato was then the main food of the great mass of the Irish people. So much was grim and incontestable fact. There was the most acute suffering, and some actual starvation, in Ireland. But there was no such thing as an Irish famine. On the contrary, there was actual overproduction of food in Ireland in 1845; men and women were dying of want in the midst of superabundance; the land of misery was also a land of plenty. There was an excellent supply of corn. There was an abundant stock of cattle, sheep, and pigs. When it became clear that the potato blight was likely to deprive hundreds of thousands of their normal food there was certainly a case for forbidding all exports of food from Ireland, and for proceeding to large measures of rationing and relief. But no Irish belly could be filled, no Irish suffering could be diminished, by simply permitting the free importation of food. There was food in Ireland already in ample quantity; what was lacking was simply the means of buying food. It was not, curious to say, a disinterested love of the potato, a daft admiration for the qualities of that tuber, or a superstition that its consumption was pleasing to the saints, that had made the poor Irish a race of root-feeders. They ate potatoes mainly because they could afford nothing else. The potato was the cheapest food they could drag out of the soil, and on it they sustained their own poor life; while they grew corn for export, they fed cattle and pigs for export, because that was the only means by which they could pay the landlord's rent. This simple fact the English statesman either would not or could not grasp. Many things could have been done for the stricken Irish

peasant which were not done. The thing that was done was surely the most singular measure of relief ever taken by a Government.

"The remedy," wrote Peel to the Lord Lieutenant on the first breathing of trouble "is the removal of all impediments to the imports of all kinds of human food—that is, the total and absolute repeal for ever of all duties on all articles of subsistence."¹

And this extraordinary fallacy was accepted at the time and has been accepted, in the main, ever since. The extreme remoteness of Ireland sufficiently explains why Englishmen, even those who should have been most ashamed to allow themselves to talk nonsense, have acquiesced in the theory that the Irish famine "forced Peel's hand." Less easy is it to explain the neglect of Irish writers, Mr. T. P. O'Connor in his *Life of Lord Beaconsfield*, and the late Mr. Justin McCarthy in his *Sir Robert Peel and History of Our Own Times*, to throw light on this dark business. It can only be suggested that their long connection with an English party from which they expected favours made it a point of honour with them to say nothing which might indicate artifice on the part of the Minister who "gave the people cheap bread." Of more value is the evidence of an Irish writer, who, free from English associations, saw facts with unperplexed vision. William Dillon, dealing with the repeal of the Corn Laws in his *Life of John Mitchel*, says:

This measure was loudly demanded by the great city populations of England and as loudly resisted by the farming population. In first announcing his conversion to Free Trade in corn, Sir Robert Peel laid much stress upon the condition of Ireland and upon the probable effect of his proposed measure in averting the famine. Now, without being disposed to judge Peel at all as severely as Mitchel does in his *Last Conquest*, one may well wonder how so able a man as he was could really have believed that Free Trade in corn was likely to benefit Ireland in her then condition. The class that was most hostile to the proposed reform in England was precisely the class

¹ Parker's *Peel*, vol. iii.

which constituted the great majority of the Irish population. To lower the price of farm products in order to benefit a nation of farmers—this was, in effect, what Sir Robert Peel proposed to do.

It only remains to add that Free Trade did nothing to avert the "starvation," and that its introduction at such a time suggested to masses of Irishmen that, having ruined their manufactures by Protection, England was now bent on ruining their agriculture by free imports.

In November Peel called together his Cabinet. It was much divided. With the Prime Minister were Aberdeen, Graham, and Sidney Herbert, who were definitely in favour of suspension of the Corn Laws, though Peel made no secret of his conviction that suspension and repeal meant one and the same thing. The Duke of Wellington had a soldierly objection to surrender, but an equally soldierly objection to desertion. Stanley knew enough about Ireland to reject the famine pretext, and took a strong line against Peel. The other Ministers wavered, with an inclination against the Prime Minister. Nothing was, therefore, settled. Shortly afterwards, however, Lord John Russell, in a letter to his London constituents, declared for repeal. Lord John had always been a moderate Protectionist, but he knew how Peel's mind was working, and, conscious of having been already caught "bathing," was doubtless sensitive about further appropriation of the clothes of his party. Should the Conservatives array themselves in Manchester cotton, the Whigs would find themselves very much out of the mode.

Disraeli has been charged with greatly exaggerating the effect of Russell's letter on Peel. Of course, no politician will ever admit that in taking a course calculated to win some popularity he has been influenced by the fear that he might be forestalled by a rival. We may be sure that the Conservative Ministers never acknowledged to each other, to their wives, or even

to themselves, that Russell's move had the least to do with their decision. No doubt they all talked solemnly about their duty in a great national crisis, "sinking" this and "putting aside" that. Nevertheless, anyone who has experience of these matters, without being sufficiently concerned in them to be deceived as politicians deceive themselves, will readily believe that the scrawl of Lord John Russell had much more part in making up the minds of the wavering colleagues of Sir Robert than had all the speeches of Cobden and all the tomes of Ricardo. From a much divided and bedevilled assembly the Cabinet quickly settled into a calm and almost unanimous one. When Ministers met again Stanley and Wellington stood alone against repeal. Stanley asked for forty-eight hours to consider his position; the Duke let it be understood that he was for unity, right or wrong. Peel could now bear himself boldly. At the beginning of the month, says Disraeli, he had submitted to be over-ruled; at the end of it he was "dictating his measures with the menace of resignation." In the interval the economic facts had undergone no change. Nothing had happened except the avowed conversion of Lord John Russell.

At the next meeting of the Cabinet, on December 2, Stanley resigned. The Duke of Wellington was still against repeal. Another Duke (Buccleuch) followed Stanley, but, "much agitated," returned to the Ministry at the earliest opportunity. Three days later Peel offered his seals to the Queen. Lord John Russell was summoned, but, having no majority, suggested that Stanley should be tried. Stanley's refusal has been characterised by Mr. Saintsbury¹ as justifying Disraeli's charge that he was guilty of "timidity as a leader," and had Disraeli been at his side the case would no doubt have been different. The Protectionists, in order to avoid repeal, would have agreed to modification of the duties, and Stanley could have counted on Palmerston and the great body of the Whig Party. However, Stanley, left to himself, did refuse; Lord John, again

¹ Biography of the Earl of Derby.

summoned to the Palace, tried to form a Ministry and failed ; and finally "handed back with courtesy the poisoned chalice to Sir Robert." Nothing loth, Peel resumed office, and the place left vacant by Stanley was filled by Gladstone.

During the whole of these confused transactions Disraeli had been abroad. His judgment on the situation is found in a letter from Paris to Lord John Manners.¹ It shows on most points his usual penetration. After quoting Thiers, who said, "If it be a real famine, Sir Robert will be a great man ; if it be a false famine, he is lost," he proceeds to give his own opinion that the famine was false, and that the question was not ripe for the "fantastic tricks" of Sir Robert, who, he said, is "so vain that he wants to figure in history as the settler of all the great questions ; but a Parliamentary Constitution is not favourable to such ambition."

Disraeli was right in thinking the famine a false pretext. He may have been right in thinking that Peel was chiefly actuated by vanity. He was wrong in believing that Peel would not be able to carry the project through, immediately and irrevocably. Disraeli gravely under-estimated forces. To the enormous influence of commercialism was now added sentiment ; the money-makers were recruited by the philanthropists. For the famine story, which has been more fortunate than the kindred warming-pan story in never having been officially discredited, had done its work. Hundreds of thousands of those vaguely kind-hearted people with which, then as now, England swarmed, were convinced that in some mysterious way a wonder would be performed in Ireland, at that time exporting wheat, by opening the ports to let other wheat in. Mighty is commercialism in England. Mighty, too, is sentiment. But when the commercialists can make the sentimentalists believe that higher dividends imply an enlargement of righteousness the combination is irresistible. Ireland went on starving, but that was her

¹ Monypenny, vol. ii.

own Papish obstinacy. She could no longer complain that food was withheld.

Parliament reassembled on January 22, 1846. The Speech from the Throne dealt mainly with assassinations and potatoes, both Irish, and for the rest consisted of a eulogy on the recent commercial legislation, the tendency of which had been towards the reduction of import duties, a rather vague intimation being added that Parliament would be asked to consider whether this policy might not "with advantage be yet more extensively applied."

As soon as the Address had been proposed and seconded Peel rose. Usually he was very lucid and a little commonplace. He was now very lucid, more than usually commonplace, and so exceedingly prolix that there can be little doubt that the dullness of the speech was intentional, and that it was designed to act as an anodyne on the country gentlemen. The House was soon reduced to yawning apathy; in its sense of boredom it lost all perception of the sinister meaning behind the Prime Minister's platitudes. Russell, with or without design, helped to confirm the impression that there could be little danger in proceedings so dreary. His spiritless review of events was heard with fatigue, and the debate, expected to yield so much sensation, appeared to be about to collapse. "Perceiving this," writes Disraeli, "a Member who, though on the Tory benches, had been for two sessions in opposition to the Ministry, ventured to rise and attack the Ministers."

The Member, of course, was Disraeli himself. His time had come. The lonely man of genius, fresh to the House of Commons, with no assets but character and mother-wit, had for two years waged unequal war on the "sublime mediocrity," strong in wealth, prestige, vast Parliamentary experience, and the firm loyalty of a party pathetically faithful to its leaders. There had been times when the business must have seemed hopeless, and the fight was not one, it must be agreed, in which the assailant could be heartened in failure by a

sense of the sacredness of his cause. It was no crusade, but partly a vendetta, partly an affair of self-seeking, to which Disraeli had devoted himself. He had an intellectual quarrel with Peel; he had an intellectual contempt for Peel. But he would have supported Peel, followed Peel, made excuses for Peel, had Peel only given him a place. There may be scorn for Disraeli's motives, disgust for his factiousness, a smile for his affectations, a frown for his cruelty. But for the ordinary sinner who loves a fighter, even when he fights not quite fairly, there must be also some thrill of sympathy. The whole thing was so plucky, so clever, so delightfully impudent—the work of a sort of *gamin*-Satan, whom so far Peel could always dismiss with cold contempt, even when most irritated by his darts of satire, as not quite the gentleman. But now with the catastrophe the *gamin* disappeared, and it was a stately Prince of Darkness that rose in sombre impressiveness to announce to Peel that his hour had come. We can see Disraeli as he stood then, the black ringlets encircling the livid face, the thin features perfectly under command, the coal-black eye alone telling of the gratification of long-baulked hatred. We can hear the quiet, cruel voice making each murderous point with cool malignity, while the victim, with sly eyes downcast, shifted uneasily on his seat.

"I am not one of the converts, I am perhaps one of a fallen party," he began; and then launched into a philippic against the chief convert—the "watcher of the atmosphere, a man who, when he finds the wind in a certain quarter, turns to suit it." He recalled how, on Catholic Emancipation, this same Peel, after resisting cogent arguments, "always ready with his fallacies ten thousand times exploded, always ready with his Virgilian quotations," had yielded to panic on the morrow of the Clare election. History was now repeating itself. Peel had been converted by some by-elections in the North of England. Nursed in the House of Commons, entertaining no idea but that of Parliamentary success, "if you wish to touch him to the quick, you must

touch him on the state of the poll." Sir Robert, he continued, had said that he was thinking of the country's future :

What an advantage to a country to be governed by a Minister who thinks only of posterity. . . . Throw your eyes over the Treasury Bench. See stamped on each ingenuous front "the last infirmity of noble minds." They are all of them, as Spenser says, "imps of fame." They are just the men in the House you will fix upon as thinking only of posterity. The only thing is, when one looks at them, seeing of what they are composed, one is hardly certain whether "the future" of which they are thinking is indeed posterity, or only the coming quarter-day. . . . If you had a daring, dashing Minister, a Danby or a Walpole, who tells you frankly, "I am corrupt and I wish you to be corrupt also," we might guard against this ; but what I cannot endure is to hear a man come down and say, "I will rule without respect of party, though I rose by party, and I will care not for your judgment, for I look to posterity. . . ." But one thing is evident, that while we are appealing to posterity, while we are admitting the principle of relaxed commerce, there is extreme danger of admitting the principle of relaxed politics. I advise, therefore, that we all, whatever may be our opinions about Free Trade, oppose the introduction of free politics. Let men stand by the principles by which they rise, be they right or wrong.

Disraeli's speech is to be reckoned among those that have deflected the course of history. Left to themselves the betrayed squires, after much grumbling and perhaps an abortive mutiny, would probably have come to heel. Nothing is more helpless than a leaderless mob, especially if it be a mob of gentlemen, who, contrary to the accepted belief, have little capacity for improvising any sort of Government, being by the nature of things always under the thumb of some expert : their own butlers, stewards, gardeners, huntsmen, and magistrates' clerks. Few things, on the other hand, are stronger than the power of party discipline. The dread of empty space, the fear of being alone, affect the political as the natural man. We have seen in our own day how the mass of the Tory Party, during several years, watched with ineffective fury the proceedings of

a Government whose policy it consistently supported in the division lobby. The leaders, reviled at every dinner table, were obeyed in Parliament and extolled on the platform until someone had been found round whom the malcontents could rally, when there was a general stampede. Disraeli was the Stanley Baldwin of that January of 1846. His audacity gave courage to those who thought with him but would never have dared to act without him ; their cheers emboldened him to further temerities ; his redoubled assurance convinced them that they could not be wrong ; and so the process of mutual intoxication proceeded until at last orator and audience were one. Both had gone beyond retreat. Peel, the betrayer, was repudiated before those who spurned him well knew what they were doing ; Disraeli, who had foreseen and predicted the treachery, was in the same act hailed as a leader of the future.

It was soon apparent, however, that the revolt had come too late, and was powerless for any purpose but the execution of vengeance. On January 27 Peel, in the much criticised presence of the Prince Consort, sitting in the body of the House, explained his policy. His speech is unreadable to-day, but for that very fact it was the more dexterous. "He played with the House as on an old fiddle," wrote Disraeli, delighted connoisseurship triumphing over all other feeling. Every party was managed but the Protectionists, and they were forced into a position in which manoeuvre was impossible and pitched battle almost hopeless. Even if they had had better advantages and a less skilled tactician against them, their case would have been hard. They were an army without officers. In the Lords they had, indeed, an embarrassment of dukes. There was the Duke of Richmond, who used to talk to Ministers of the Crown as if they were his own footmen. There was the Duke of Newcastle, who had just caused his own son to be defeated at a by-election for daring to take office under Peel. There was the Duke of Buckingham, Disraeli's old patron. But these high and puissant

princes were either slenderly endowed in natural faculty, or had little acquired political talent. Stanley was not without ability or experience, but was irresolute as to his course and was not at once available ; not until March, when the Protectionist Party was surely established, did he consent to accept its leadership. Such was the position in the Upper Chamber, where the landed interest was naturally strongest. The Protectionists' plight in the Commons was still more forlorn. It seemed for a moment that Disraeli could count only on a crowd of obscure country gentlemen, fit for little but cheering. From their ranks, however, there presently emerged a remarkable figure.

Lord George Bentinck, a descendant of that Dutchman who, by the favour of William III, received, with the Duchy of Portland, enormous grants of English and Irish land, had been no friend of Disraeli's. He had said "No!" almost with oaths and curses when the young adventurer's name was put before him in connection with one of the family boroughs. Disraeli, moreover, had once described his uncle, Lord William Bentinck, as "a drivelling nabob," and Lord George must have resented the quip even if he agreed with it. People often think meanly of their relatives, but they dislike other people publicly translating the thoughts into words. There was hardly a point on which Bentinck and Disraeli were not in opposition. In 1845 Lord George had condemned as unjustified the philippics against Peel, and he clearly believed them to be actuated by the worst motives. But now that the Prime Minister had shown his hand Bentinck promptly put aside old prejudices, acknowledged that Disraeli had been right, and hastened to strengthen the hand of the only man who, as he instantaneously recognised, could hold his own against the Front Bench. Bentinck was in many ways a remarkable personage. He had, in his own words, "sate in eight Parliaments without having taken part in any great debate"; but he was regular

in his attendance, and so conscientious in all his duties that he often hurried in hunting kit from the country to take part in important divisions. Keeping horses in three counties, he had been told that Free Trade would save him £1,500 a year. "I don't care for that," he replied vigorously, "what I can't bear is being sold." Peel, he felt, had sold him and his kind, and Peel must smart for it. For a "tragic vindictiveness," to borrow the phrase of Lord Rosebery, was part of Bentinck's character. He would not forgive or forget injury to himself, to a friend, or to a cause. Peel had doubly offended him, first by his desertion of Canning, secondly by his desertion of Protection. The first injury he had revenged only by occasional insubordination; the second, in his view, admitted of no retribution short of destruction; it may be inferred, therefore, that he placed public before private wrongs. He was a wretched speaker, but he had a head for figures, and his political opinions were in many ways curiously liberal for one who, in all externals, was *status quo* incarnate.

Disraeli and Bentinck made a formidable combination. Disraeli brought to the partnership vision, dexterity, wit, and the wizardry of words. Bentinck's high rank, stately figure, obvious integrity, industry, and military eye for tactics gave it solidity and respectability. Rivalry between men so unlike was impossible, and the admiration each learned to feel for the other was deep and genuine. Bentinck is dismissed by Lord Rosebery as an "extraordinarily bad judge of men." But Disraeli, at least, was an extraordinarily good one, and he seems to have decided at once that Bentinck was no case for Oriental finesse, and could be managed only by direct dealing. Whether Bentinck was in fact lacking in perception may be doubted; he was an excellent judge of horses, and, as a great philosopher has observed, a good judge of horses is a good judge of anything. He died too soon for his full quality to be revealed; had he reached the normal span, he might have taken a respectable place among English statesmen. He had not the gift of words, but in natural mental

endowment he seems not to have been Peel's inferior ; he had rather more culture than Palmerston ; his character was infinitely stronger and finer than Stanley's.

Under this partnership, formed and maintained under conditions of dignity on both sides, the Protectionists from a rabble were turned into some kind of fighting force. Bentinck became, in spite of himself, their leader ; Disraeli, with true Hebrew instinct, made himself the power behind the throne.

The debate on the motion to go into Committee on the Government proposals lasted for twelve nights. Disraeli spoke on the sixth. Neither of his two chief speeches during this memorable Session can be considered wholly satisfactory. He had no difficulty in showing that Peel was not the man to repeal the Corn Laws ; even Cobden felt that to be an impropriety. He was less happy in stating the case for Protection. There was one powerful argument which he had already used in 1843—the only argument, indeed, by which Free Trade could be challenged. Cobden was undoubtedly right, and every intelligent man of the time could see that he was right, in holding that Free Trade would increase the wealth of the country, and he could be opposed on national and patriotic grounds only by the argument that certain great industries, of which agriculture was the chief, were vital to the welfare of the nation for other than purely economic reasons. The real question before the country then was whether England should be a land mainly of farms or mainly of factories. It had to choose whether it should become the lop-sided thing we now know, or whether a chance should still remain open for a more symmetrical development. A chance—the case for retaining the Corn Laws could hardly at the moment be put higher than that. For it was certain that if the agricultural party remained a landlord party, it could not indefinitely bend the country to its will. There would never have been the smallest chance for Free Trade had England possessed a peasantry at that time ; and it could have

been defeated had the landlords, instead of relying on mere obstruction, taken the initiative on lines which Disraeli had indicated in his novels—if they had adopted the essential spirit of Young England, without its incidental fantasies. But in truth there was little to choose between the owners of the old wealth and the owners of the new. The landlords had the advantage that they were at least patriotic according to their own lights. They thought a great deal of England if they did not think a great deal of most Englishmen. But neither they nor the Manchester philosophers were big enough to see that the ultimate greatness of a nation, whether it be expressed in money or genius or dominion, must depend on the health and faculties of the great mass of the people. The country magnates resembled the manufacturing magnates in one respect if in no other, that they cared very much for their own personal rights and profits, and very little for the happiness of those who created their wealth. It was therefore easy for the manufacturers to set against them popular opinion in the towns, and there was no corresponding strength of popular opinion behind them in the country. The loaf was a thing everybody understood. It could not be denied that taxation made the loaf dearer than it need be, and to all appearance the only class benefited by taxation was the monopolist in land. So the moment the monopolist ranks were split a motley array of enemies appeared from all quarters to make the rout decisive, and the landowners in their extremity were without effective support from the labourers or even the farmers.

It was probably consciousness of these facts which dictated Disraeli's tactics. He evaded, as far as possible, the main issue. The argument that agriculture should be protected on other than economic grounds, because of its importance to the country, would have been readily met by the taunt that "the country" simply meant broad-acred squires and nobles. And if, in reply to such taunts, he should extend the definition of "landed interest" and outline a policy for

the restoration of the yeomanry and peasantry, it was quite certain that his own people would take fright. Apart from their hatred of ideas as ideas, such ideas as these savoured of French atheism and republicanism. Finally, it is evident that he did not want to antagonise unnecessarily the industrialists. In *Sybil* he had given a perfectly truthful and very ugly picture of the system for the benefit of which Free Trade, as implying cheap labour, was demanded :

Naked to the waist, an iron chain fastened to a belt of leather runs between their legs clad in canvas trousers, while on hands and feet an English girl, for twelve, sometimes for sixteen hours a day, hauls and hurries tubs of coal up subterranean roads, dark, precipitous, and plashy ; circumstances that seem to have escaped the notice of the Society for the Abolition of Negro Slavery. Those worthy gentlemen appear to have been singularly unconscious of the sufferings of the little trappers, which was remarkable, as many of them were in their own employ. . . . Infants of four and five years of age, many of them girls, pretty and still soft and timid. Their labour . . . is passed in darkness and in solitude. They endure that punishment which philosophical philanthropy has invented for the direst criminals, and which those criminals deem more terrible than the death for which it is substituted.

What Disraeli thought of the industrial system of his time we know from his novel. But in the House of Commons he was all compliments for Mr. Cobden. The explanation is not obscure. Since his uppermost desire was the destruction of Peel, he had to reflect carefully before making any unnecessary enemies. The old Free Traders must be opposed, but should not be offended. On some other issue they might be useful allies in the one all-important business.

Thus it is that we seek in vain, in his speech on the motion for going into Committee, for the sort of insight and passion or for the broad philosophic view which distinguished the novels in which he deals with the question. There are only one or two passages to raise the speech above the commonplace. His repudiation of the theory that, if England adopted Free Trade, other

nations would follow her example, has been justified by time. But it can still be argued, though with decreasing force, that the economic loss has not been England's. More impressive, in the light of events seventy years later, was his warning of the peril in time of war to a nation depending mainly on imported foodstuffs. But the most interesting part of the whole speech was its conclusion :

We have been told, and by one (Mr. Cobden) who on this subject should be the highest authority, that we shall derive from this great struggle not merely the repeal of the Corn Laws, but the transfer of power from one class to another—to one distinguished by its wealth and intelligence—the manufacturers of England. . . . I must confess my deep mortification that in an age of political regeneration, when all social evils are ascribed to the operation of class interests, it should be suggested that we are to be rescued from the alleged power of one class, only to sink under the avowed dominion of another. If this is to be the end of all our struggle—if this is to be the great result of our enlightened age—I, for one, protest against the ignominious catastrophe. I believe that the monarchy of England, its sovereignty mitigated by the acknowledged authority of the estates of the realm, has its roots in the hearts of the people, and is capable of securing the happiness of the nation and the power of the State. But, Sir, if this be a worn-out dream, if indeed there is to be a change, I for one hope that the foundation of it may be deep, the scheme comprehensive, and that instead of falling under such a thralldom, under the thralldom of capital—under the thralldom of those who, while they boast of their intelligence, are more proud of their wealth—if we must find a new force to maintain the ancient throne and immemorial monarchy of England, I for one hope that we may find that novel power in the invigorating energies of an educated and enfranchised people.

In a single phrase he had defined the whole issue, so far as concerned the nation. For the labourer Free Trade meant cheap bread. For the manufacturer it meant cheap labour. For the country it meant the "thralldom of capital."

In the second reading debate he took no part. He may, as Mr. Monypenny says, have been in bad

health, but he was certainly busy behind the scenes, and he may have felt that such subterranean activities were more important than making speeches. Bentinck had developed a certain power of speaking, repulsive but not ineffective, and what he lacked in inspiration he made up in industry, since he spent all his mornings in being coached by experts, and could be trusted not to leave the House even for a meal. Disraeli was no doubt chiefly engaged in seeking allies. This was his only hope. The Government on second reading got a majority of 88, and thus on their sole strength the Protectionists were clearly beaten. Two possibilities presented themselves. Palmerston, who professed himself in principle a Free Trader, had just spoken, to the general surprise, in favour of a "moderate fixed duty," and there was some hope that the Whigs, who after all had as large a landed interest as the Conservatives, and perhaps even more, might, despite Lord John Russell's Edinburgh letter, he brought into a combination against Peel. Something, too, might be hoped from the Irish. O'Connell, a shade of his former self, "a feeble old man muttering over a table," as Disraeli described him at this time, was supporting Free Trade because he realised that, once having carried the measure by Opposition votes, Peel must fall, leaving office to the Whigs. To the Whigs O'Connell belonged body and soul, having virtually abandoned repeal for the prospects of patronage. But some at least of his party were still free men. Smith O'Brien, in particular, was ready to strike a bargain with the Protectionists, and the circumstances appeared on the whole favourable to its completion.

For the Government's energies were not monopolised by the legislation which was to bring about a social revolution in England. It was also busily pushing forward a Bill for the coercion of Ireland, anticipating no serious opposition from any English party. "However they may differ," wrote Mitchel, "as to the propriety of feeding the Irish people, they agree most cordially in the policy of taxing, persecuting, and

hanging them." This statement exaggerated the facts. Exception should have been made for both Bentinck and Disraeli. Bentinck, whose politics must have been learned anywhere but at Westminster, "nursed in his secret soul a great scheme for the regeneration and settlement of Ireland, which he thought ought to be one of the mainstays of a Conservative policy." When coercion was demanded as the only means of preventing Irish landlords being shot by their tenants, he was not at once ready to take the responsibility of opposition, but he was still unconvinced that the means were either adequate or well chosen. Disraeli's view was more decided. "In less than a century," he wrote, "there had been seventeen coercive Acts for Ireland, a circumstance which might make some ponder whether such legislation was as efficacious as it was violent;" and he asked his associates to hesitate before pledging themselves to the Government. His request, however, at first elicited little sympathy; the well-known mixture of dullness and scruple was too formidable to be immediately pervious to the arguments of one who was neither dull nor scrupulous. Finally, however, he got his supporters to agree to a compromise; they would support the Bill, but only on their own terms.

The argument was that if the Bill were really meant to stop assassinations then it was wanted without the loss of an hour; if it were denied precedence over other business, then it was not needed at all, and should be opposed. This was good tactics as well as good logic. For if time were taken up over Ireland the Corn Bill would be delayed, and the Lords would have a pretext for declining to pass it. In his *Life of George Bentinck* Disraeli is discreetly vague concerning the negotiations with Smith O'Brien. He throws the onus on the latter, and is reticent regarding himself—facts which can be amply explained by the Young Ireland leader's conviction and transportation to Tasmania. Light on the subject, denied by Disraeli's prudence, is provided by a few sentences from Sir Charles Gavan Duffy's *Four Years of Irish History*:

O'Brien and one or two others were approached by a new party, composed of seceders from Peel. . . . Of the Minister's Bills the new party detested one, and approved the other; but Mr. Disraeli taught them not only to resist the measure they disliked by a system of Parliamentary obstruction, never so effectually employed before, but to resist the measure they approved, the Coercion Bill, on the ingenious hypothesis that to arm a Government with extraordinary power is in effect to express extraordinary confidence in it, and as Peel had forfeited their confidence he was not entitled to this tribute. The Irish Members would have failed, as they had often failed before, to avert coercion, but for this unexpected ally.

From this it must be inferred that the first move came, probably by indirect means, from Disraeli. The speeches both of O'Brien and Bentinck show clearly that at least a limited understanding was reached, and the fact was evident to interested observers in the House of Commons. The Free Traders were much alarmed, as well they might be, for between them Protectionists and Irish commanded a clear majority. Cobden, furious at the prospect of defeat by a union between the two agricultural interests, was stung into declaring that it was not they "but the people who live in towns," who were going to rule the country. Peel was accused of cheering this statement, but the point was really immaterial; supremacy of the towns was implicit in his legislation.

The much dreaded alliance, however, came too late to change the course of British economic history. The force of habit persisted among country gentlemen, who had always regarded Irish Coercion Bills as things to be voted without question. On first reading the measure was supported by most of the Protectionists, though Disraeli, who could not very well go into the lobby against his followers, walked out of the House rather than take part in the division. "Strong measures," he wrote afterwards in regretful strain, "were popular with many most respectable people who, not having very deeply investigated the conditions of our sister isle, held that violence could only be successfully

encountered by restraint." Peel, thus victorious, was at liberty to follow his programme. The "most respectable persons" among the Protectionists were, in fact, depending on the House of Lords to throw out the Corn Law Bill, and the Prime Minister was protected from any recurrence of the Irish danger by the temporary disappearance of Smith O'Brien, who was locked in the cellar for some infringement of rules. O'Connell, safe to do nothing to offend the Whigs, was once again undisputed leader of the Irish.

Disraeli's speech on the third reading extended over three hours. Perhaps its most interesting passage is that in which he warned his hearers against entrusting the life of England to the new industries. If agriculture decayed, would the factories be able to supply and support the people? Would not the progress of invention and the employment of women and children tend always to reduce the number of men workers, on whom, after all, the country must depend for its ultimate safety? But though he thus showed his distrust of the Free Trade vision of England as "the workshop of the world," though he suggested clearly the dangers of a whole nation getting away from its land, he made no attempt to give the House of Commons his full mind. That must be sought in his novels. His speeches on Free Trade were no doubt suited to his audience and circumstances, but who cares now about statistics concerning Congou tea, Bengal sugar, Mysore coffee, and the corn-growing capacities of "the exuberant plains of the Ukraine"? Nevertheless, all this no doubt convinced his followers that they were fortunate in having as an advocate so knowledgeable a fellow, and imparted a certain authority to the most bitter of his attacks on Peel :

For between forty and fifty years, from the days of Mr. Horner to those of the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Cobden), that right honourable gentleman has traded on the ideas and intelligence of others. His life has been one great Appropriation Clause. He is a burglar of others' intellect. Search the index of Beatson from the days of the Conqueror to the

termination of the last reign, there is no statesman who has committed political petty larceny on so great a scale. . . . Sir, the right honourable gentleman tells us he does not feel humiliated. It is impossible for anyone to know what are the feelings of another. Feeling depends upon temperament ; it depends upon the idiosyncrasy of the individual ; it depends upon the organisation of the animal that feels. But this I will tell the right honourable gentleman, that though he may not feel humiliated, his country ought to feel humiliated.

Under these taunts, cheered loudly by the gentlemen of England he had expressed himself so proud to lead, Peel is left to writhe and blush, while his tormentor goes on to his magnificent conclusion :

I know, Sir, that we appeal to a people debauched by public gambling—stimulated and encouraged by an inefficient and short-sighted Minister. I know that the public mind is polluted with economic fancies ; a depraved desire that the rich may become richer without the interference of industry and toil. I know, Sir, that all confidence in public men is lost. But, Sir, I have faith in the primitive and enduring elements of the English character. It may be vain now, in the midnight of their intoxication, to tell them that there will be an awakening of bitterness ; it may be idle now, in the spring-tide of their economic frenzy, to warn them that there may be an ebb of trouble. But the dark and inevitable hour will arrive. Then, when their spirit is softened by misfortune, they will recur to those principles that made England great, and which, in our belief, can alone keep England great. Then, too, perchance, they may remember, not with unkindness, those who, betrayed and deserted, were neither ashamed nor afraid to struggle for “the good old cause”—the cause with which are associated principles the most popular, sentiments the most entirely national, the cause of labour, the cause of the people, the cause of England.

But neither statistics nor invective could compensate the Protectionists for their failure to secure Irish votes, and on May 15, 1846, in a House of 560 members, the decision was taken that has made much of England a slum and more of it a desert. The third reading of the Bill for the Repeal of the Corn Laws was carried by a majority of 98.

CHAPTER VIII

STANLEY'S listless leadership made matters easy for the Government in the House of Lords. He still disliked Disraeli, and his heart was not really in the business of opposition. From Bosworth Field onwards the Stanleys have shown no great attachment for lost causes, and he must have recognised very soon after his resignation that the cause was lost.

The atmosphere of the Upper House was, moreover, quite different from that of the Lower. In the Commons the struggle was real, and therefore bitter. In the Lords the main notion—one with which the present generation is familiar—was amenity; it was more important to preserve party unity than to defeat a possibly obnoxious measure. But was the measure, after all, so very obnoxious? In fact the great Peers were less threatened for the moment than the country gentlemen, and many of them, having already made vast sums out of the sale of land for railways and the leasing of land in the neighbourhood of growing industrial towns, were not ill disposed to a system which, promoting urban development, promised even richer opportunities. Love of peace and love of pelf carried the day, and on second reading there was a substantial majority of 47.

The Protectionist hopes were now destroyed. "Vengeance, therefore," wrote Disraeli, "had succeeded in most breasts to the more sanguine sentiment." Free Trade clearly must be; the more reason that its author should perish. From the time it became clearly hopeless the warfare took on a complexion of utter savagery. It was no longer sufficient to discredit Peel; he must be extinguished. "In this state of affairs," says Disraeli, "it was submitted to Lord George Bentinck that there appeared only one course to be taken, and which, though

beset with difficulties was, with boldness and dexterity, at least susceptible of success." In other words Disraeli proposed to put Peel in a minority by voting against the second reading of the Coercion Bill. If the Protectionists went into the lobby against Peel he was clearly doomed, for the Whigs, with a chance of office, would undoubtedly take the same course, and with them, of course, would go the followers of O'Connell. The chief doubt was whether the "most respectable persons" who had shown scruple before would now help in throwing out what Bentinck himself had called "the anti-murder Bill."

The desire for vengeance, it would seem, has more impelling power than either self-interest or patriotism. The "most respectable persons" sincerely believed that their own rents were in danger from the Corn Bill. They sincerely believed that England's true interests were threatened. Yet while action might still have saved all they had declined to act. It was only after all had been lost that nearly a third of their number yielded to the persuasions of Disraeli. On June 25, 1846, the Corn Bill passed its final stages in the Lords. On the same night—or more exactly, in the small hours of the next morning—the division on the second reading of the Coercion Bill was taken in the Commons. A few days before Disraeli had warned Peel that Nemesis was ready to "seal with the stigma of Parliamentary reprobation the catastrophe of a sinister career." The moment had now arrived to show he had uttered no idle threat.

Into the lobby against the Government trooped the "gentlemen of England" Peel had been so proud to lead. After the Mannerses, the Somersets, the Bentincks, the Lowthers, and the Lennoxes trooped "the men of metal and large-acred squires. . . . Mr. Bankes, with a Parliamentary name of two centuries, and Mr. Christopher from that broad Lincolnshire which Protection had created; and the Miles and the Henleys were there; and the Duncombes, the Liddells, and the Yorkes; and Devon had sent the stout heart of Mr. Buck, and Wiltshire the pleasant presence of

Mr. Long." With them, too, went the Whigs, who, with their own Coercion Bill up their sleeves, had no hesitation in opposing the restrictive proposals of a tottering enemy. And with them also went the Irish, rejected as allies in a constructive policy, but good enough to speed the plan of revenge. Even Cobden voted political death to the statesman who had given his system legislative life :

" They say we are beaten by seventy-five ! " whispered the most important Member of the Cabinet in a tone of surprise to Peel. Sir Robert did not reply or even turn his head. He looked very grave, and extended his chin, as was his habit when he was annoyed and cared not to speak. He began to comprehend his position, and that the Emperor was without his army.

A pity that no great artist was there to imprison for ever on an inspired canvas the expression which animated Disraeli's pale features in that moment of triumph. It was a victory too empty for elation, but there must have been in him something of that furious pleasure he describes Contarini Fleming as feeling when he flung on the dung-heap the half-inanimate body of his schoolboy adversary. No doubt his lips assumed that " curl of triumphant scorn " which Willis had noted years before at Lady Blessington's.

Within a week Peel resigned, and a few days later Russell was kissing hands at Windsor. There had been an unsuccessful attempt to patch up peace between the two Conservative factions. Lyndhurst, for the Peelites, had held out the olive branch to Stanley, who was himself willing enough, but Bentinck would not consent to shake hands with what he regarded as treason. Disraeli's views have not been preserved, but he was no doubt on Bentinck's side. Self-interest would alone suffice to dictate such an attitude. After his terrible attacks on Peel co-operation with that statesman was impossible ; there are some injuries which cannot be

forgiven either by those who suffer or by those who inflict. Moreover, Disraeli's position in a united Conservative Party could only be relatively unimportant, whereas among the detached Protectionists he must enjoy pre-eminence.

The political position, indeed, was almost exactly similar to that produced nearly eighty years later by an unauthorised change of policy on the part of the Conservative leaders. In 1846 Peel committed his party to Free Trade against the wishes, if not of a majority of the party, at any rate of all the most vital and honest elements of that party. In 1922 Mr. Austen Chamberlain committed his party to Irish semi-independence against the wishes, if not of a majority of the party, at any rate of every element definitely and stubbornly Unionist. Bentinck the titular leader, Disraeli the virtual leader, of the one revolt, find their analogues in situation, if not in character and talent, in Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Stanley Baldwin. When such a split takes place new vested interests are at once created, and as between the old and the new the advantage is almost invariably on the side of the latter. For it is seldom that the dispossessed statesmen take a cool and objective view of their position. Their tendency is to exaggerate their popularity, to think too highly of themselves and too meanly of their rivals, to imagine themselves regretted by the country, to regard a restoration as always imminent. They await in sulky dignity their recalling by the acclamations of the populace, and the longer the acclamations are delayed the less their disposition to unbend. The usurper, on the other hand, is always on his mettle, always distrustful of himself and the popular mood, eager to conciliate, enterprising in his search for new allies. He has, moreover, the immense advantage of being in possession. He has enormous patronage to distribute. Few are too great to reject what it is his to give. Few are too proud to disdain the gift because they dislike or distrust the giver. The sight of a sieve full of corn appeals to the thoroughbred no less than to the roughest

farm drudge. Thus it is that weak Governments and Governments of "second-class brains," formed in the sequel of a great political division, so often show a vitality disappointing to dispossessed demigods.

It was so with Disraeli. The split raised him at once to the first importance. The clever but suspected adventurer suddenly towers up a statesman who may be reviled but must not be ignored. A few months before Peel's conversion the Duke of Rutland was "writing to John" concerning that noble youth's unwise attachment to a mistrusted Jewish trickster; now we find Disraeli, as statesman, an honoured guest at Belvoir Castle, there by no minor's invitation, but at the gracious wish of the noble Duke himself. Isaac Disraeli could no longer say, "What does Ben know about Dukes?" Ben knew that Dukes have mouths for pudding and knees for Garters. But, though he had secured his personal position, there is the best evidence that this triumph did not prevent his being in a very real sense a disappointed man. During the winter, while Bentinck was occupied with plans for fighting starvation in Ireland, Disraeli set himself to complete a novel which he had begun or planned in his Young England days. *Tancred* he himself rated as his best book. It is interesting biographically because it indicates how the events of 1846 had given the author a new and a distinctly lower political standpoint. On entering politics he had described himself as a Nationalist, though others could only see him as a Radical. In his subsequent appearance as a Tory there was no major inconsistency. The original Tory faith had been in essence national, and had a great deal of kinship with the kind of Radicalism professed by Cobbett, which was worlds asunder from Whiggery, from the Manchester School, from Gladstonian Liberalism, and from the more modern Social Reform Radicalism. Disraeli saw past and present very much as Cobbett did. He had formed his own view of the maladies from which England had suffered from the Reformation to the Reform Act; he was under no illusion as to the

efficacy of the political cure offered by the Whigs or the economic cure offered by the Free Traders; but up to 1846 he seems never to have lost faith in the greatness of England, the island kingdom. He seems never to have doubted her capacity to recover her lost health. Chartism had suggested to him the existence of a popular will strong enough to prevent the new plutocracy succeeding to the powers of the old "Venetian oligarchy." The Tractarian movement had promised a spiritual no less than a political re-birth; and, whatever Disraeli's own theological judgments, he would then have been ready to range himself with Pusey, or even with Wiseman, against the materialism of the school of Bentham. As late as 1845 he could believe, apparently, that the fight was hopeful. "The Utilitarian system is dead," said Coningsby. "It has passed through the Heavens of philosophy like a hailstorm, cold, noisy, sharp, and peppering, and it has melted away." No man marked with a less illusioned eye the physical and moral rottenness the unchecked industrialism of his day was producing. But he saw in "the landed interest"—by which he did not mean simply the interest of landlords—a solid core of health and strength, which might enable the nation to conquer the cancer and throw out the virus.

But with the repeal of the Corn Laws the whole situation, as he saw it, was changed. The rising of the people was to end in mere bluster. Decisive political power was to pass from a class which, however selfish, was at least national, to a class which, however well meaning, was essentially cosmopolitan in its outlook. With the masses definitely divorced from the land, their dependence on the capitalist must be absolute. When trade was bad they would be riotous; when trade was good they would be tractable; but the mutiny would be that of a starved, the content that of a well-fed slave. The new economic conditions might bring to the people fullness or want, or an alternation of each; what it could not bring them was power to govern their conditions. It might bring for a time more and more

wealth to Belvoir Castle, but though the walls should yet stand awhile the foundations were already being sapped. The Duke might still maintain the mere state of a potentate, but without a peasantry or yeomanry his solid influence must vanish, and the passage of time must leave him an anachronism and a shadow. It was claimed for Peel that he saved England from Revolution; Disraeli would have replied that he had delivered England over to a deadlier thing, evolution, the dominion of blind forces, the most degrading of all tyrannies, implying the subjection of the will of men to the tendency of things. For Free Trade in its essence was as surely a form of Calvinism as Darwinism itself. Theological Calvinism assumed an implacable God, political Calvinism an implacable law of supply and demand, scientific Calvinism an implacable law of "biological necessity."

Thinking as he did, Disraeli, had he been an Englishman, might well have retired from politics. The party to which he belonged had had an intelligible cause. That cause it had lost, through what he must have considered sheer stupidity. It had neglected his astute counsel, and had been ruled, in rejecting the Irish alliance which might have saved it, not by his clear brain, but by "the stout heart of Mr. Buck." A patriot who thought only in terms of England, and was convinced, as Disraeli certainly was, that England had committed a capital error in deciding to be the workshop of the world, could hardly have turned, as he did, with a light heart to the next move in a party game that was now meaningless.

But Disraeli was not only a careerist. He was also a Jew, that is to say a foreigner, attached to England, as foreigners often are, but not of England. He might think that England had abdicated her position as a nation. That was sad for England, a little sad for himself, who fancied England and believed himself equal to seeing her through her troubles. Sad, but not utterly tragic. England might be doomed as England, but after all there was a wider world than England, and

even than Europe. England had doomed herself as England, the insular kingdom. But she might have another chance if she made herself the head of an Empire: what kind of Empire did not, roughly speaking, matter. It was in 1846 that Disraeli ceased to be a Nationalist, and became an Imperialist.

Tancred makes very clear what was in his mind on the morrow of Manchester's victory over the agricultural party. The Emir Fakredeen, speaking to Montacute, is simply Disraeli speaking to himself. The Oriental's opening advice is significant:

The Queen will listen to what you say; especially if you talk to her as you talk to me, and say such fine things in such a beautiful voice. . . . You will magnetise the Queen as you have magnetised me.

At this date it is unlikely that Disraeli had ever spoken to the Queen, but that time, he had determined, was to come, and he was confident that he would speak with success. With his knowledge of the heart of a woman, and his shrewd guess at the inscrutable hearts of princes, he, if anybody, could talk convincingly to a female sovereign.

"Gloze it over as you may," continues Fakredeen, "one thing is clear; it is finished with England." For this astonishing statement three reasons are given. In the first place there is the drain and strain of Ireland, "O'Connell appropriating to himself the revenues of one half of Her Majesty's dominions." Secondly, the accepted fallacy of "the workshop of the world": "The cottons; the world begins to get a little disgusted with those cottons; naturally everybody prefers silk; I am sure that the Lebanon in time could supply the whole world with silk." Thirdly, the diminishing security given by the British Navy in an age of new inventions: "With this steam your great ships have become a respectable Noah's Ark." "The game is up," goes on Fakredeen. But . . . :

Now see a *coup d'état* that saves all. You must perform the Portuguese scheme on a great scale. Let the Queen of the

English collect a great fleet, let her stow away all her treasure, bullion, gold plate, and precious stones ; be accompanied by all her court and chief people, and transfer the seat of her Empire from London to Delhi. There she will find an immense Empire ready made, a first-rate army, and a large revenue. . . . Your Queen is young ; she has an *avenir*. Aberdeen and Sir Robert Peel will never give her this advice ; their habits are formed. They are too old, too *rusés*. But, you see ! the greatest Empire that ever existed ; besides which she gets rid of the embarrassment of her Chambers. And quite practicable ; for the only difficult part, the conquest of India, which baffled Alexander, is all done !

Lord Rosebery once indulged a vision of such a "sublime transference" ; it is a way with non-English Imperialists. But the Empire of Lord Rosebery's fancy had its seat in America and was white. Disraeli the Oriental drew no colour-line. It may be objected that it is absurd to seek for the serious opinions of the author in the rhodomontades of one of his characters ; and the Delhi plan, no doubt, can be treated much as Lord Rosebery's American *hejira*, that is to say, as a flight of fancy implying no set conviction, but throwing some light on the habit of mind of the dreamer. But, in fact, Fakredeem is utterly nonsensical as an Emir ; no Syrian of the time could possibly have had his insight into English affairs ; and not only is his analysis of the situation Disraeli's, but it proves Disraeli to have observed contemporary facts with an astonishingly prophetic vision.

To men of the time it must have seemed the wildest nonsense to say "it is finished with England." But, literally and strictly, the thing was true. It was finished with England, the compact island entity of ten centuries, from the moment its rulers decided that the bulk of the food its people lived on must be produced by foreigners and dependent communities. From that moment England could not develop on national lines. She had a choice between expanding overseas and shrinking in Europe ; she could make herself an Empire, to the loss of some of her individuality, or she could

sink into a greater Holland, unless perchance her enemies decided that she should experience the fate of a lesser Carthage. This idea is implicit in Fakredeen's remark about the cottons. The fancy of the Victorians that for ever, and in ever-increasing quantities, all the nations of the earth would buy from England did not deceive Disraeli. As a Jew he had no prejudices, and it was impossible for him to believe that Europeans, Americans, Colonials, or for that matter Asiatics, would for all time be incapable of supplying their own wants. He saw that the struggle for markets must grow more and more bitter as the necessities of England, with her unhealthily swollen industrial population, grew more and more imperious. To Disraeli the system which made Staffordshire depend on the passion of Bolivia or Siam for English-style cups and bedroom china must be an unstable system. "Palmerston," says one of the Syrians in *Tancred*, "will never rest till he gets Jerusalem." Another agrees, because "the English must have markets."

Fakredeen is otherwise equally sapient. In realising the gravity of the Irish problem Disraeli was far in advance of nearly all his contemporaries; and, if he contributed nothing to its solution, he nearly always spoke commonsense concerning it. The feud with O'Connell had led him astray from his precociously statesmanlike attitude; but he made due atonement during his Young England and Protectionist periods, and in wisdom he persisted until circumstances made it plain that Ireland must either be ruled as a conquered country or allowed to go her own way. Reconciliation was possible while the interests of the two islands remained mainly agricultural. With the sundering of that bond all hope vanished. To the antagonism of creed, race, and temperament was added the much more serious difficulty of any understanding between two communities fundamentally divided in interest. To the town populations at least in England Free Trade long appeared a blessing. To the dwindling and impoverished agricultural population of Ireland

it bore only the aspect of a new curse imposed by the English.

As to the third of Fakredeen's prophecies, it was superficially inexact, but was it fundamentally untrue? In spite of steam the "great ships" of the British Navy continued omnipotent, and no successor of Louis Philippe could "take Windsor Castle whenever he pleased, with the wind in his teeth." But though Disraeli was wrong for the moment, and though his eye did not penetrate to a sky swarming with aircraft and a sea alive with submarines, he had at least the prescience to see that the march of scientific invention was especially a danger for a country of concentrated industries and dependent commerce. Had Nelson's whole fleet been sunk at Trafalgar England might still have survived. Nothing could have saved the British Empire had Jellicoe risked and lost his whole force at Jutland.

The political ideas in *Tancred* have been very inadequately examined. Indeed, many decades had to pass before they became intelligible to critics imbued with the strong delusions of their time. The book has been noticed chiefly as an exposition of Disraeli's religious ideas. On this side his intention was clear enough; it was to demonstrate that Christianity is simply an extension of Judaism. But with him Judaism is something wider than the Jews. There is a mystic virtue in the whole Arab race.

"Let men doubt of unicorns," says the Moslem chief Amalek, "but of one thing there can be no doubt, that God never spoke except to an Arab."

"Sheikh of Sheikhs," says Fakredeen to Amalek, "there is but one God; now is it Allah or Jehovah?"

"The palm-tree is sometimes called a date-tree," replies Amalek, "but there is only one tree."

"God," says Fakredeen, quizzing the young English lord, "had never spoken to a European."

"Pray," says a Jewish maiden to Tancred, "are you of those Franks who worship a Jewess, or of those who revile her, break her image, and blaspheme her pictures?" "I venerate, though I do not adore, the

mother of God," answers the hero, who is an Anglican of the Oxford Movement. "Ah!" exclaimed his companion, "the mother of Jesus. . . . He was a great man, but he was a Jew. . . . Now tell me: suppose the Jews had not prevailed upon the Romans to crucify Jesus, what would have become of the Atonement?"

In fine, the author's object is to emphasise the world's debt to the Semitic race, and the special pleading is for the most part brilliant. But while the common origin of Judaism and Christianity needed no proof, the attempt to demonstrate that the creeds to-day are for all practical purposes identical was futile. The facts were too stubborn. No Christian becomes a Jew. Few Jews become even nominal Christians, fewer still become Christian believers. A difference which permits of no compromise must be fundamental, and it is felt as fundamental on both sides. Indeed, unless we think of Disraeli as a sceptic, whose pride in Judaism was racial and whose belief in Christianity was political, this fallacious breadth of view is quite incomprehensible in a man of his intellect. In fact, of course, he was a sceptic. His position was in essence that of many Japanese thinkers who, while rejecting Christian dogma, desired their country to adopt Christianity as a more potent influence on the masses than the less energetic Buddhist creed. Buckle quotes him as saying that the Jew "invented alike the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer." This would be indeed a singular remark in a believer, but it is perfectly consistent with the glorification of the Semitic genius which is, in truth, the "religion" of *Tancred*.

But if he were a sceptic, Disraeli was at least consistent and intelligent in his scepticism. If he honoured the prophets and Apostles chiefly as great Jews, and regarded religion as the chief of those "ideas" which keep society together, he yielded no honour at all to the ideologues whose speculations tended to rend society asunder. He did not reject the prophets only to accept the professors. If a theology of which the evidence had satisfied centuries were incredible to him, he would not

surrender his mind to the latest unproved theories of astronomers, geologists, and anatomists. It is merciless fun he makes of the young lady who tells Tancred to read *The Revelations of Chaos*, otherwise *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*—the work which prepared the way for Darwinism :

"Everything," says Lady Constance, "is explained by geology and astronomy, and in that way. It shows you exactly how a star is formed ; nothing can be so pretty ! A cluster of vapour, the cream of the Milky Way, a sort of celestial cheese, churned with light, you must read it, 'tis charming. . . . But what is most interesting is the way man has been developed. You know, all is development. The principle is perpetually going on. First, there was nothing, then there was something ; then, I forget the next. I think there were shells, then fishes ; then we came—let me see, did we come next ? Never mind that, we came at last. And the next change there will be something very superior to us, something with wings. Ah ! that's it ; we were fishes, and I believe we shall be crows."

Disraeli had no knowledge of science or inclination for it, and would have deserved ridicule had he intervened with mockery in a strictly scientific discussion. But as a citizen, philosopher, and statesman, he had a clear right to attack that extension of evolution which could be described in the words of the coachman in *Pickwick*—"political, and, what's much the same thing, not true." A scientific theory, put forward with scientific reserve, is secure against lay ridicule. But any human being is entitled to deride propositions such as "The first bird was very like a reptile, therefore there is no God," or "All progress comes through the struggle for existence, therefore nobody should give a beggar half-a-crown, and every forward-looking community should have its lethal chambers for social failures." Disraeli had the wit to perceive at once that much of the scientific speculation of his day was socially noxious. Seventeen years after the publication of *Tancred* he asked at Oxford :

Is man an ape or an angel ? I, my Lord, am on the side of the angels. I repudiate with indignation and abhorrence

the contrary view, which I believe foreign to the conscience of humanity. . . . What does the Church teach us? That man is made in the image of his Maker. Between the two contending interpretations of the nature of man, and their consequences, society will have to decide. The rivalry is at the bottom of all human affairs.

Disraeli on the side of the angels did not appear to his contemporaries a serious figure. But probably he never spoke more seriously in his life. For the "contending interpretations" in themselves he doubtless cared nothing, but he realised better than most people of his time that all thought must have practical consequences. The philosophy of Judaism had preserved the purity of a race; the philosophy of Christianity had created a brotherhood among diverse races. No Jew, however rich or powerful, could deny to any other Jew, however poor or feeble, a place on that platform on which he was himself elevated above the mass of mankind. No Christian king, warrior, or even slave-holder could evade the confession that his subject, his enemy, or his serf was his spiritual equal. The Hebrew prophet was appealing to what appeared a self-evident proposition when he reminded the tyrant that the poorest Jew had rights which must not be infringed; the peasant raised to the Throne of St. Peter was appealing to a truth felt as strongly when he claimed for the oppressed serf, the crushed vassal, the beaten enemy, a certain value which must not be ignored. In the Jewish scheme to which Disraeli's fathers belonged, in the Christian scheme to which he had been admitted, there was, for what it was worth, this protection for the poor and the unsuccessful, and this check on the rich and triumphant, that all the differences between power and ignominy, between wealth and indigence, were as nothing compared with common membership, the one of a Chosen Race, the other of a divinely instituted Church. The defect of Judaism was its exclusiveness. The glory of Christianity was its catholicity. But the new doctrines favoured a more than Jewish racial exclusiveness, while

they inverted the Christian catholicity. Races fancying themselves ethnologically superior would regard other races as Amalekites to be extirpated or as Gibeonites to be reduced to servitude. But among all races there would also be classes which regarded other classes, whether native or foreign, as naturally and inevitably inferior; to the new accentuation of international rivalries would be added a new accentuation of class divisions. The proud nation would feel that it was fulfilling the purpose of Nature in exterminating the weak nation; the proud individual would feel that he was helping the survival of the fittest in keeping down the incapable individual.

"We are a link in the chain," said Lady Constance, "as inferior animals were that preceded us; we in turn shall be inferior; all that will remain of us will be some relics in a new red sandstone. This is development. We had fins; we may have wings."

But the reading public of 1847 did not hear the marching feet of the Prussian super-men, still less the scuffling of the Red Armies of Russia. If a few grasped the possibility of the new learning being used to justify the anarchy of industrialism, there were apparently none who foresaw that the ape theory would cut both ways. It could be used by the super-man to justify getting the last ounce out of the subter-man. But it could also be used by the subter-man to dispute all the moral pretensions of the super-man. Elimination of all idea of the Divine in man's origin and destiny had two very natural consequences. The masses, told that after this life they could expect nothing, came to the conclusion that in this life they were of all men most miserable, and accordingly demanded more and more material gratification. It is comparatively easy to reach saturation point in an individual, but where millions are concerned it is not so easy. Therefore the constant demand among the stronger nations for better food, better housing, and above all for more amusement, implied more and more demand for markets, territory, and raw materials. No mechanic could buy a motor-bicycle

without enlarging the motive of his rulers to annex tropical lands and contest for new oil-fields. Hence a constantly enlarging impulse to wars of aggression. But meanwhile the only considerable discouragement of such wars was greatly diminished. Man as an individual being now so unimportant, it followed that the State in relation to him became of vastly more consequence. A Christian ruling class could never be wholly callous over vast bloodshed, and if, as was the case in the eighteenth century and afterwards, the ruling class happened to be chiefly pagan, it still was under the influence and amenable to the criticism of great classes really Christian. When, however, it was generally held that man was only the last development of the animal creation—and not wholly a success at that—the loss of life was not in itself a matter of moment. All depended whether the lives lost were those of dear people or of cheap, and whether they were sacrificed to good advantage. So a German military thinker could coolly count the cost of the "next war," and hold "a million casualties" as well compensated by the permanent disablement of one of the inferior breeds. A precisely similar callousness was observable in the victorious Russian proletariat. It did not kill its enemies with anger, as if they were men; it coolly exterminated them, as if they were vermin.

In *Tancred* Disraeli revealed more of himself, and more sides of himself, than in any other novel. He seems to have gone out to unload his mind of all that he had thought on politics, religion, and sociology; possibly he realised that this was his last chance, and that in his new position he would never again be able to write with such freedom. The book contains some malicious character sketches and much excellent light comedy. Yet its dominating note is somewhat mournful. It has none of the buoyancy of the Young England novels; it smells of lost illusion. Coningsby, of whom we get another glimpse here, is a very different person from the gallant youth we left "on the threshold of public life." He has "a noble mansion in Park Lane"; he wishes his wife

to be "a social power"; he no longer talks about a nation being saved by its youth. The author, also, had doubtless come to see that a fine dream is none the less a dream. He could never have taken Young England altogether seriously; but the ideas he gave to Young England were serious ideas, and the tone of *Tancred* suggests him mourning that only babes and sucklings could be found to accept them as wisdom. In 1844 he had only a tiny following, but he was an intellectual force. In 1847 he had become a leader of the strongest single party in the State. But it was not all gain. To be something politically he must be something very seriously less than his full self; he must return in great measure to the mood of Vivian Grey, so long outgrown, and rule men by entering into their often alien feelings, humouring weaknesses not shared, sympathising with sorrows not felt, echoing the prejudices of blockheads and the merriment of fools. This was the work now before Disraeli. It was work, no doubt, sometimes irksome, despite "the pleasant presence of Mr. Long" and the satisfaction of manipulating "men of metal and large-acred squires." Except as regards his career—the exception, of course, is large—Disraeli from now onward must be regarded as a disappointed man.

When Parliament met in 1847 for a last session before a General Election, its main pre-occupation was the condition of Ireland. The potato failure of 1845, which Peel made an excuse for bringing forward his Free Trade proposals, had been only partial. In 1846 the failure was complete. It was now seen how hollow had been the pretence that the repeal of the Corn Laws was a step towards coping with Irish famine. Irish corn and meat continued to be exported while Irish juries everywhere were adding to their verdicts of starvation the charge of "wilful murder against Lord John Russell." In February Bentinck introduced a Bill to "stimulate the prompt and profitable employment of the people by the

encouragement of railways in Ireland." Disraeli spoke in support of this measure, which modern Irish writers agree in praising as the one statesmanlike proposal advanced by a British politician at that moment of horror. The "state of the money market," however, decided the Government to oppose it, and Russell announced that he would resign if it were carried. Bentinck was quite ready to form a Government himself if necessary, but he was "almost the only member of his party who was undaunted." Disraeli stood by him, but, it must be imagined, with no great conviction. If it had been impossible to organise an alliance when it was a question of saving the Corn Laws, it was scarcely likely that "the stout heart of Mr. Buck" would be moved to advance £160,000,000 on doubtful security for the benefit of a distrusted people. On the division for second reading Bentinck was routed. Even the Irish failed him. O'Connell and his following had now sunk to absolute dependence on the Whigs, and preferred control of Irish patronage to the rescue of their compatriots from starvation.

The General Election in the late summer of 1847 did not give the Whigs a majority, but made their position fairly comfortable. The Peelites—"Wee Frees" of their period, pharisaical, dissatisfied with their leader, "constantly putting themselves up to auction and buying themselves in again"—were not to be taken seriously except by themselves. The Irish were tame cattle. Bentinck's party, though numerically considerable, had no longer a policy, since it had gone to the polls announcing that Free Trade must be given a fair trial. In fact, though the farmers and landowners might toast Protection, they were apathetic about it. It was obvious that for many years to come high prices must prevail, and meanwhile there were tempting financial possibilities for the great landlords in the new openings for capital which the manufacturing industries provided. Disraeli, now Member for Buckinghamshire, told his constituents that an hour of "national penitence" would surely come, but he made

no pretence that Protection, as he understood it, could return. Other interests were forging ahead, and when at last the ruin of British agriculture arrived the landlord and the farmer would complain in vain. The old economy had perished; Disraeli was shrewd enough to see that the very wealth of England would prevent her making any effective resistance to the forces of evolution; she was too rich to have a revolution. One of his prophecies of this period concerns an "Imperial Union" for customs purposes—an anticipation of the Zollverein of Joseph Chamberlain—but how it would benefit either the English farmer or the English landowner he, no more than Chamberlain, could tell. But the matter is worth noting as one more indication of his passage from Nationalism to Imperialism.

At the moment, however, the most troublesome question for him was the election of his friend and compatriot, Baron Lionel de Rothschild, for the City of London. The Baron, an orthodox Jew, would take no oath "on the true faith of a Christian." It was in all respects an awkward problem. The Tories were for the most part uncompromising in their opposition to the admission of a self-confessed non-Christian. Bentinck, on the other hand, was as strongly against any kind of disability on the ground of religion. Disraeli seemed to have regretted the raising of the question. It was an embarrassment to his party; it could not, in his view, be much benefit to his race. At the start of his Parliamentary career he had voted against a measure which, while not specifically designed to add to the privileges of the Jew as citizen, would in practice have had that effect. Now, however, the Jewish problem was raised squarely, and he could not avoid it. Thus he and Bentinck were on one side; their party was without exception on the other. But while Bentinck was a mere advocate of toleration, Disraeli's pride of race forbade him to use arguments which might be applied equally on behalf of a Taoist

or a fire-worshipper ; and in the House of Commons he spoke of Israel as he had written of it in *Tancred*. Against the idea that the Christian character of the House should be maintained he said nothing, or rather he lent his voice to its support. "On this very ground," he exclaimed, "you will found and find the best argument for the admission of the Jews." This view found favour nowhere. The majority of the House was ready to admit Rothschild, but it did not take kindly to the theory that Jew and Christian were one and the same thing. Disraeli was much interrupted and sat down without applause.

As a consequence of this disagreement Bentinck resigned his leadership. It has been suggested that Disraeli rejoiced at his departure, seeing his way the clearer to personal aggrandisement. Such a view seems utterly unreasonable. Bentinck having resigned on the Jewish issue, it was impossible for Disraeli, whose attitude had been even more unpopular, to take his place, and for the rest Bentinck was the best possible security for Disraeli's position. Indeed he had hardly gone before there were intrigues for a Conservative reunion, which would certainly have eliminated Disraeli. The "gentlemen of England" had found him a useful ally. But it is an English habit to quarrel with allies and forgive enemies at the end of a fight, and though Disraeli had a few warm personal friends, he was by no means loved, and he had in many quarters energetic enemies. Beresford, Newdegate, and other pronounced Protestants in the Protectionist ranks were devoted to his destruction, and that their attacks received countenance from Stanley seems certain. "I tell you," wrote Bentinck to Stanley in reference to attacks in the *Morning Herald*, "none of all this could have happened, had you played a generous part."¹

Apart from the fact that Disraeli knew Bentinck for a loyal man, rivalry between the two was impossible. Bentinck had remarkable aptitude for party manage-

¹ Buckle, vol. iii.

ment and industry in fulfilling its least attractive obligations. But he knew his own limitations, he generously recognised the parts of his gifted lieutenant, and under no other leader could Disraeli hope for equal liberty of action or chance of distinction. Bentinck now stood firmly by him, and urged the Protectionists in the Commons to make Granby their leader, for the single reason, it would seem, that Granby was one of the few aristocratic politicians with whom Disraeli was on cordial terms. Granby, however, declined the honour, and no leader was elected. The Protectionists were once more a mob; nobody knew whither they were going or what was their excuse for existing. Cobden actually advised them to join the Manchester Radicals in the championship of economy. Yet, while Disraeli remained one of them, they could not be ignored.

During 1848, the year of revolutions, he greatly extended his Parliamentary reputation. The middle 'forties, just before the repeal of the Corn Laws, had seen a boom in trade, but almost immediately after came a wave of depression like that which had helped to produce the Chartist rising of 1839. For the return of working-class distress Disraeli was able, with much plausibility, to indict the Free Trade philosophy. "He cuts Cobden to ribbons," wrote Bentinck during this session, "and Cobden writhes and quails under him just as Peel did in 1846." There was a bank crisis, and the Government, living in a state of chronic financial muddle, introduced four Budgets in the one year. The various remedies proposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer were likened by Disraeli to "the liquefaction of St. Januarius's blood, . . . equally efficient and equally a hoax." Nobody on the Protectionist side could make such speeches. In quiet times the Conservatives might have perhaps dispensed with him; but with "a starving people and a world in arms" the need of one intelligent spokesman was obvious. The

monarchy fell in France. Both Adriatic and Baltic were blockaded. Four pitched battles were fought in Europe in eight weeks. For ten days London lived in terror of sack by the Chartists. The Whig Cabinet called for the services of the Duke of Wellington. The Duke declared that the Prince Consort ought to take command of the Army. The Prince said he could not leave the Queen's side. Feargus O'Connor swore to the masses assembled on Kennington Common that he would get them their rights or die on the floor of the House of Commons. Smith O'Brien actually raised a sort of rebellion in Ireland.

In such circumstances many of the Protectionists were convinced that the country would soon have to turn to them. But, Disraeli and Bentinck apart, they had nobody who could be imagined as leading the House of Commons. Parliament had only just risen when the choice was still further limited. Bentinck, who during the session had consistently overworked himself, fell dead while taking a country walk near Welbeck. Though retired, he had remained active in politics, and was always a possible figure round which to rally in case of emergency. His death compelled the appointment of a regular leader.

Two factions immediately formed. On the one side were Bentinck's close friends, who held that he had virtually bequeathed the leadership to his brilliant lieutenant. On the same side were those who had yielded to Disraeli's powers of fascination. On the other was Stanley, and with him a numerous body who disliked Disraeli on racial, religious, or personal grounds. The great noblemen seem to have been, as usual, most tolerant—they probably looked on the matter much as they would have regarded the appointment of a valet; they had no objection whatever to a foreigner if he knew his work better than a Briton. The Duke of Richmond, the Duke of Newcastle, the Marquess of Granby, and Lord Mandeville were among Disraeli's most prominent supporters. Those who held with Stanley that any dullard was to be preferred to the most

brilliant politician of his time were mostly squires who, unlike the great—shamelessness is the one permanent distinguishing mark of any aristocracy—had to consider their respectability. Stanley, of course, had his own reasons for objecting to the Jew, most prominent among them being the fear of being over-shadowed.

During the winter attempts were made to induce Disraeli to serve under the elderly Mr. Herries. He refused with great firmness, talked about returning to literature, and of becoming again a free lance, and made it perfectly clear that he had no notion of being any man's lackey. The bold course paid. People who had scornfully thought of him as a cheap thing marked in too high figures, and had confidently reckoned that he would take any indignity rather than lose his market, now began to count the cost of his secession and possible opposition. Stanley became nervous, after his wont, the moment he was faced with a masculine resolution. The more he yielded the more Disraeli stiffened, and at last the great Lancashire lord was forced to his knees.

The compromise he offered was, in fact, a complete surrender. The party in the House of Commons was left nominally in the hands of Disraeli, Granby, and Herries. In this triumvirate one man must combine the rôles of Octavius and Antony, while the other two sustained between them the part of Lepidus, the "slight unmeritable man." Only a few weeks of the next session had passed before Disraeli's *de facto* leadership had become also *de jure*, and the "gentlemen of England" acknowledged the Jewish adventurer as one of their two chiefs.

As an amused foreigner remarked, it was "a great triumph for liberal principles."

CHAPTER IX

THERE was one thing to console those gentlemen of England who might still find an ignominy in being led by a Jewish adventurer. Disraeli was still an adventurer, but it was no longer on the petty scale; and he had himself become a gentleman of England by virtue of owning a reasonable area of English land.

Shortly before he attained the leadership, and it would seem as a step towards its attainment, he had decided to purchase the Hughenden estate in Buckinghamshire. He was naturally attracted to the place from his early associations with what he delighted to call "Beechy Bucks," to say nothing of an apparently general law which makes the most English of English counties the home of so many distinguished people of his race. But it was until recently a mystery how a notoriously needy man contrived to make the purchase. He was still embarrassed. Mrs. Disraeli was incapable of further help. The recent death of old Isaac Disraeli had put him in possession of a few thousands, but for such a project the meagre inheritance was of little avail. It was reserved to Mr. Buckle to tell the curious story. Bentinck, it appears, had recognised the weakness of Disraeli's position, had generously resolved that his associate should be worthily attached to the soil of England, and had enlisted the sympathy of his brothers, Lord Titchfield and Lord Henry Bentinck. He did not live to carry out his plans, but the two surviving brothers, says Mr. Buckle, took over the whole responsibility, and Disraeli was enabled to gratify his ambition "at the cost of owing them over £25,000." Such calculating improvidence was of a piece with earlier extravagance. To any ordinary person already heavily

in debt a new obligation on such a scale might well seem appalling ; and still more formidable was the implied committal to an expensive form of life. But if it were true, as Disraeli and his friends apparently believed, that no man could play a great part in the Conservative politics of those days unless he lived the life of the old ruling class, the transaction is to be justified on precisely the same ground as those which had preceded it. It was an entrance fee.

Not that Disraeli's motives were purely utilitarian. He had enjoyed the D'Orsay days for their own sake, and not solely for the opportunities they gave him ; he now revelled in Hughenden apart from any conviction that it was necessary to his prestige. It satisfied certain yearnings of his strangely complex nature. Literary fame alone did not content him ; Parliamentary fame alone would not have contented him. With all his Semitic and aristocratic pride, there were singular English middle-class fancies that craved indulgence. It was not enough to be Solomon in all his glory ; there must be added the twopenny dignity of a Justice Shallow. The man who allowed his vision to wander over vast expanses of Asiatic splendour and dominion wanted also the worship of a hamlet. He hankered for things peculiarly English : for a private pew in his own church, for a seat on a county bench, for the bobbing of old village dames, for the forelock-pulling of bent old men, for the patronage of a living, for a deputy lieutenancy, for a freemasonry in the punching of fat cattle and the scratching of prize pigs, for acceptance by squires as one of themselves. In short, he was not wholly exempt from the weakness of so many of his race. Priding himself on being the pure Jew, he still wanted to figure as the representative Englishman. In many Jews such desire leads to vulgarity ; in so superior a man as Disraeli it was no more than amusing.

However valuable as insurance or delightful as toy, Hughenden was expensive. But the Disraelian luck held. According to Froude, he received " a large sum

from a private hand " for his *Life of Bentinck*, while a Conservative millionaire took over his debts from the Jews, charging him a modest three per cent. in lieu of the extortionate interest he had been paying. Later Mrs. Brydges Willyams, an eccentric old lady of Hebrew ancestry, forced herself on his acquaintance, and ultimately left him her fortune. Luckier than Elijah, he was fed by doves as well as ravens. But careless though he might be about money, and little as he regarded it for its own sake, it soon appeared that he was not destitute of a business sense. When he bought Hughenden the rents were below the average of the county. Immediately after the purchase he raised them. Most of the old tenants, unable to meet the demand, relinquished their holdings, and were replaced by new men who could afford to pay an economic rent. There was here no question of oppressive dealing, and no doubt the case was one of simple necessity. But it must be agreed that Disraeli as a landowner fell somewhat short of Disraeli as the Young England idealist.

Possibly as a consequence of his new status, he showed some haughtiness in beginning his career as a Parliamentary leader. Very shortly after the fall of Peel he had shed all eccentricities of dress, and to the sombre severity of conventional Front Bench attire he now added something of the arrogance of the conventional Front Bench manner. "Men of metal and large-acred squires," who found that he expected deference, did not like the change. Nor were they pleased with his almost immediate modification of his attitude to Protection, which he now thought "not only dead but damned." The oscillating conscience of Stanley was troubled. Reluctant and irresolute when the Protectionist cause had a chance of winning, he was scandalised at dropping it now it was definitely defeated, and many of his followers were of his view that, while Protection could not be a policy, it should remain a fad. Disraeli's realism, which now made him as ready to deny the faith as he had been to seek strange alliances on its behalf, was shocking to "the stout heart of Mr. Buck."

Nevertheless it is possible to argue to-day that while Disraeli was right in defending Protection in 1846 he was also right in dropping Protection after 1848. The Corn Laws might have been restored, in some form, had the agriculturists declared emphatically for them at the intervening election. That opportunity neglected, the cause was lost. In 1846, indeed, there had been some difficulty in defending the duties, for already the drift had set in towards industrialism. A few years later the drift was irresistible. In 1848 the distress in the textile trade had given Disraeli the opportunity of arguing that Free Trade had failed even as a specific for industrial prosperity. But the trouble was only temporary. A very little while after the Chartists had been dispersed from Kennington Common an era of good trade set in. Wages rose, and though population started forward with unexampled speed there was work for all. Cobden's prophecies seemed to have been fulfilled. Agriculture had not yet felt the pinch, since the overseas supplies of food had barely kept pace with the increased demand, and such rural workers as might be displaced could always find a place in the slums which were springing up with fungoid speed and ugliness in the manufacturing regions. The voice of Carlyle was heard declaring that all was not well, and that such "unexampled prosperity," even if it could last for ever, was little to rejoice over. But he was almost solitary in his pessimism, and, as a licensed grumbler, who had, it should be noted, denounced the Corn Laws and "the trade of land-owning" as ferociously as anybody, he was little heeded. Disraeli, as a "practical politician," might see much more clearly than Carlyle the way the country was going, but if nearly everybody was satisfied, what use was it to protest? Mr. T. E. Kebbell, in his notes to *Selected Speeches* of Disraeli, suggests that the change of front was due to a desire to "heal the schism" and bring back the Peelites. That this consideration may have weighed is possible; that it was "paramount" can hardly be shown. After the establishment of his own position, and especially after

Peel's death, Disraeli would no doubt have welcomed any available talent, if only in view of the practical inconvenience to which he was put by the dearth of intellect in his own party. But there is no need to seek anxiously reasons for his wishing to banish Protection to the limbo of lost causes. That it was a lost cause is a sufficient explanation. Peel's revolution, for good or ill, had been successfully engineered, and it was idle within a very few years to clamour for a counter-revolution. Disraeli accepted the accomplished fact. But to suggest that he was, like Peel, converted to Free Trade, is to misread the facts. A Free Trader he never was. When he ceased to be a Protectionist, as the word had been understood, he turned to "Reciprocity" and to "Colonial Preference," anticipating by many decades (though with a difference) the ideas of the twentieth-century Tariff Reformer. Moreover, a correspondence with Lord John Manners, his former special disciple, suggests other grounds for a conviction that there could be no turning back. Disraeli pointed out that in the three Republics quoted by Lord John as examples of Protectionist democracies the classes directly interested in Protection were very considerable in amount, and that "the awkward problem of rent does not arise among the peasant proprietors of France—our great Republican authority for agricultural Protection."¹ Disraeli might still be favourable in theory to Protection for the "landed interest," but he realised that in England the connotation of the term was always narrowing. Clearly Protection for Lord John's father, the Duke of Rutland, would never be again granted by the masses in the towns, while the creation of masses in the country who could enforce Protection implied a policy which the Duke, if not Lord John himself, would certainly have resisted.

In short, if there was opportunism in Disraeli's change of front there was also statesmanlike recognition of facts. He had never envisaged Protection as a mere means of maintaining a landlord class. He had regarded

¹ Buckle, vol. iii.

it as the only safeguard of a healthily developed national life. The chance of enlisting the sympathy of the people was gone, and the most convinced Protectionist among his dukes would rather have seen England one elongated slum from Carlisle to Rugby than have submitted to his broad estates being cut up into tiny holdings. Disraeli had dreamed for a moment of an English revolution constructively complete as that of France, but without the destruction and break of historical continuity which had, in Talleyrand's strong words, "*désossé la France*." The dream was over ; it remained to make the best of the pedlars' paradise promised by the Manchester School. Let it be granted that Disraeli was an opportunist ; it is not necessary to call him a cynic.

In another direction, however, he did reveal himself, perhaps for the first time, as completely cynical. In the autumn of 1850 Pope Pius IX re-established the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Great Britain, dividing the country into a number of dioceses. This "act of aggression" was warmly resented, and a "No Popery" cry was started by Lord John Russell, who inveighed impartially against "the mummeries of superstition," the claims of Rome, and the Tractarian movement which was carrying part of the Anglican Church towards "the verge of the precipice."

Disraeli perceived much political advantage from this episode. One of two things must happen. Either Russell must follow up words by deed, in which case the Irish would turn on the Whigs and rend them, or he must run away from his words, in which case the enthusiasm he whipped up would be available to the service of Conservatism. Disraeli was privately entertained at the whole business. "I think John Russell is in a scrape" fairly represented his inmost feelings. But as a politician he was deeply impressed by the explosion of Protestant feeling. The outburst of indignation against all that appertained to Rome, the

burnings of the Pope in effigy, the stoning of Cardinal Wiseman's carriage, and so forth, convinced him that in *Coningsby* and *Sybil* he had been toying with fire when he wrote with sympathy of the old religion, of those who still professed it, and of those who, while unable to accept it, thought of it with kindness. Twenty years were to elapse before he published his next work of fiction. When it appeared it was found to be an indictment of those who had left the Established Church to seek refuge in "mediæval superstitions, which are generally only the embodiments of pagan ceremonies and creeds."

It was in the domain of foreign policy that Disraeli makes the most favourable impression during these early years of responsibility. He held the balance on the whole remarkably even between Palmerston, who was for intervening everywhere, and Cobden, who was for intervening nowhere. Strongly attracted by questions of Empire, he did not, like some late Imperialists, let extra-European interests obscure the fact that England is a part of the European scheme, and that nothing occurring in Europe can be indifferent to her.

Thus when Prussia in 1848 made the first attack on Denmark, under the plea that the Slesvig-Holstein duchies, having a German population, should not be joined to a foreign State, Disraeli in a noteworthy speech defended Palmerston, who, he conceived, was really speaking for England in championing Denmark:—

Germany (he said), which possesses almost every other advantage, is not a great naval Power, and Germany wants a coast. This is the real reason why Denmark, supposed to be weak, is to be invaded in this age of liberty on the plea of nationality. It is to gain the harbours of the Baltic and to secure the mouths of the Elbe that the plea of German nationality is put forward.

He argued further that under the theory that the German flag must fly wherever the German language was spoken France would be deprived of Alsace and Russia

of Livonia. For many years he was blamed for being so little sympathetic to the principle of German unity, but it is now obvious that he saw more clearly than any of his contemporaries that it was being used as a pretext for Prussian aggression. The simultaneous movement for Italian unity he at first resisted on grounds perhaps less substantial. For Austria he entertained, by reason of his partiality for Metternich, a rather excessive reverence, and on the special question of her hold on Italy he had fallen into an error of the kind he reprobated in Palmerston. It was the evil fashion of the day—a fashion which survived to our own time—for English politicians to support abroad what they conceive to be the analogues of English ideas, and, just as Palmerston patronised the Italians because they were supposed to be Liberal, so Disraeli defended the Hapsburg Monarchy as a Conservative institution. From one point of view, however, there was something to be said for his discouragement of Italian ambitions. It was at least honest, and the same could not be said of the attitude of those Radical Pacificists who, while cheering and fêting the Italians, refused them any substantial aid.

It is usually held that Disraeli had little but contempt for nationalist movements generally. The allegation deserves a moment's examination. In *Tancred* he had declared that "all is race," and had treated "race" as the master-key to history. The notion was natural to him as a Jew, for the Jews are, apparently, racially pure. But when he attempted to apply the idea to the English he evaporated—a rare thing with him—into sheer nonsense. An attempt to explain the success of the English, one of the most mixed peoples in Europe, by calling them "Saxons," might be pardoned in some professor with a bee in his bonnet, but was scarcely worthy of one who really had claims to be reckoned a political thinker. History provides a flat denial of the theory that race is a decisive factor in the life of a people, and shows that nationality, which is but another name for historic consciousness, has far more practical bearing

on events. People will die for a faith, for a flag, for a chief, for the safety of their own land or the possession of another. They will frequently die even for trade, though it is generally found expedient to cloak a mere Stock Exchange war. They will work for themselves, or for their children, or for their masters. But no man ever said with his last breath, "All is well lost for the great Nordic family," or felt his labours sweetened by the reflection that he was adding to the glories of the Celto-Iberian race. Disraeli was clearly astray if he thought the sentiment of nationality could be neglected. But if, as is possible, he merely realised that nationality is often a stalking-horse for the designs of imperialists or revolutionaries, he was right in insisting that the Liberals of the day were too prone to accept nationalistic pleas without due examination.

While he often opposed Palmerston, however, he felt for that Minister a good deal of admiration; and the sentiment was reciprocated. The two were the only British statesmen of their age—if we exclude the mere negations of Cobden—whose notions of foreign policy had root in any kind of philosophy; and Disraeli frequently came to the aid of Palmerston against the Radicals. The sketch of Palmerston as Lord Roehampton in *Endymion* is drawn with tenderness and more than a touch of reverence:

He is the man. He does not care a rush whether the revenue increases or declines. He is thinking of real politics; foreign affairs; maintaining our position in Europe.

In the once famous Dom Pacifico debate, arising because a Greek mob had wrecked the house of a Maltese Jew of Portuguese extraction and British nationality, even the exigencies of party could not prevent Disraeli from showing his sympathy with the Foreign Secretary, who made the incident an occasion for thundering forth his "Civis Romanus sum."¹ But with another side of

¹ Owing to the presence in their city of a Rothschild the Athenians had been forbidden their annual pageant of the burning in effigy of Judas. Much annoyed, they burnt Pacifico's house instead. No insult to England was intended. There was simply a failure to understand that a Jew might be also a Briton.

Palmerstonian diplomacy he was frequently at variance. Palmerston could hardly be called a Liberal, and his main political feat in domestic politics was that of a Joshua ; for ten years he made the sun of Radical progress stand still. But he believed in English and Liberal ideas as articles of export, and was always ready to let Continentals do what he liked. He thought the Queen of Spain should marry a Protestant. He was anxious to compel the Queen of Portugal to establish Constitutional Government on the true Westminster model. He apparently believed that the revolutionaries of Italy and Hungary were really groping towards the principles of that "great and glorious" revolution which the English nobility had effected in 1688. "Be ye British, saith the Lord Palmerston," was the tenour of his despatches, and he could never understand why rulers of foreign States should neglect or resent advice so wholesome and so disinterested.

Disraeli, on the other hand, took the perhaps more reasonable view that foreigners had a right to be foreigners and to follow their own courses, however inferior, and held that interference was unjustified unless some distinct English—and it must be added Jewish—interest were involved. Thus he thought the Queen of Spain should have been congratulated, without reference to her prospective bridegroom's religion, morals, manners, or possible lack of masculine competence. He had no idea of sending a fleet to the Tagus to give first-aid in Constitutionalism. For revolutionaries anywhere he felt no kindness. "Ancient communities like the European," he wrote, "must be governed either by traditionary influence or by military force." He was thus inclined, as a merely practical question of preserving the peace, to favour communities and governments with roots in the past rather than those which had only just arisen or were still struggling to be. The view might not be heroic, but Disraeli in this matter was a stark realist. He saw in Europe what was there, while others saw chiefly what it pleased them to see. He was under no illusion, like Carlyle, as to the

character of "noble, patient Germany." He realised that the Continental Liberals, leagued in secret societies, had exceedingly little in common with the Russells and Cavendishes, and even less resembled the Gladstones, Cobdens, Brights, or Roebucks. Being a foreigner, member of a tribe which knew every State, he understood foreigners as Palmerston could not. Both worked honestly for England. But while Palmerston's interferences were always resented abroad, Disraeli's attitude, even when recognised as cynical, was sometimes approved and seldom gave unnecessary offence. Palmerston, essentially simple, won in the chancelleries the reputation of duplicity. Disraeli's duplicities gained him the credit for a sort of honesty. The one was incalculable—a King of Whims. The other was playing a game according to well-known rules.

Eventually it was Palmerston who brought down the Whigs, but a year earlier, at the beginning of 1851, they had been out of office for a few days. "He who eats the Pope dies of his meal," and Lord John's position after his "No Popery" pronouncement was that of an agonised dyspeptic. The Irish made things so uncomfortable that when a pretext came for resignation Lord John Russell seized it with great eagerness.

The Queen, on his advice, sent for Stanley, who suggested a combination of Whigs and Peelites. The strength of the Protestant fever, however, made the latter impossible as Ministers. Of their chief men three, Gladstone, Herbert, and the Duke of Newcastle (son of the Protectionist Duke) were notorious High Churchmen. Stanley was therefore asked to try again. He made a show of attempting to form a Government, but apparently had no wish to succeed. Whatever his own feelings, however, the matter was decided for him by the Queen. For no sooner did Her Majesty learn that, if Stanley became Prime Minister, Disraeli must be one of the Secretaries of State, than she intervened with considerable emphasis. Her objection was com-

prehensible. Thinking ill enough of Disraeli in the Young England days, she had been further incensed by his conduct to "poor Sir Robert Peel," and (though she did not mention this most decisive point) the Prince Consort detested Disraeli, as having "not one single element of the gentleman in his composition." If, declared the Queen, Mr. Disraeli could not be excluded from the Cabinet, Lord Stanley must make himself responsible for his further behaviour. Possibly with inward qualms, Stanley gave the necessary assurances, informing the Queen that Disraeli was now a quite respectable person, but his attempt to make a Government proved abortive, and for nearly another year the Whigs carried on.

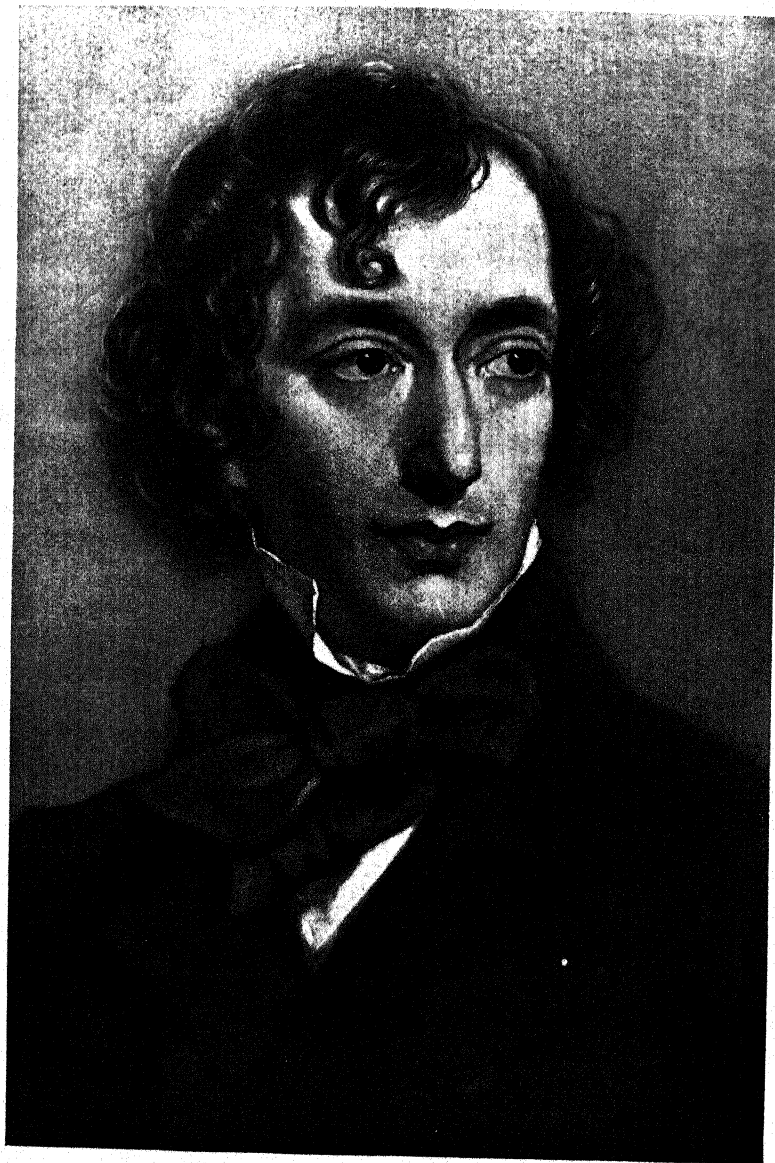
They were finally brought down, with much else of more importance, by Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* in Paris. Palmerston, with his usual precipitancy, gave that stroke his blessing, and was immediately in trouble with everybody. Liberals were shocked at a display of friendliness towards a man who had kidnapped elected deputies. The Court, prompted by Baron Stockmar, was scandalised by the neglect of etiquette in failing to consult it before recognition was accorded. Palmerston had to resign—to use his own words, he was "kicked out"—and without him the Government was too weak to stand.

When Parliament assembled for the session of 1852 Disraeli spoke with consideration of the fallen Foreign Secretary, partly no doubt from policy, for it would have been a great thing to gain Palmerston for the Conservative Party, but also probably because he held that Palmerston had been right, if somewhat rash. For much of the outcry against the *coup d'état* was due to imperfect appreciation of the facts. The Republic was in any case moribund, and Napoleon had but anticipated an Orleanist conspiracy to overthrow it. The Liberal denunciation of Palmerston was especially fatuous. The English Liberals seem to have been quite unaware that his dismissal was regarded everywhere on the Continent as a victory for absolutism. However, as he

had been sacrificed mainly to the outraged feelings of the Court, Disraeli could give him no more than a handsome valediction.

Palmerston, however, was not a man to be snubbed with impunity. Within a very few days he was in a position to write to his brother that he had had his "tit for tat with John Russell," having defeated the latter with the aid of Tory votes on an amendment to a Militia Bill. Stanley—or rather the Earl of Derby, as he had recently become—was again summoned by the Queen, and Disraeli at once wrote to his chief suggesting that Palmerston should not only be offered a place in the Government, but should also be invited to lead the House of Commons. Though the proposal may not have been so altruistic in fact as in appearance, it showed a complete absence of pettiness. In the previous year the main difficulty in the way of forming a Conservative Government had been the scarcity of men of even moderate abilities among the Protectionist ranks. This had necessitated the advance to the Peelites, in spite of their unpopular religious views. Disraeli was now anxious that there should be no repetition of failure, and, rather than lose the chance of office, or occupy place without power, he was willing to serve under Palmerston. Derby seems to have appreciated his attitude, but he would neither abate his posthumous love for Protection nor brave the Queen by offering Palmerston the Foreign Office. Palmerston therefore refused to join the Government, to the great detriment of its prospects. When formed, it contained but three politicians—Derby, Lonsdale, and Herries—of previous Cabinet experience, and but two—Disraeli and Derby—possessing any sort of distinction.

To Disraeli was awarded the Exchequer. "Incredible rashness," said the *Morning Chronicle*, and even the *Morning Post* admitted that the appointment was among "the least expected." Disraeli himself was momentarily aghast, and hinted that he knew nothing of finance, but Derby brushed aside the objection with the cheery reminder that permanent officials



THE RIGHT HONOURABLE B. DISRAELI, M.P.
Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1852

existed to provide a Chancellor of the Exchequer with his figures.

There were actually two sound reasons for the selection of this post. In the first place Derby, still hovering between desire to attack Free Trade and fear of the consequences of such attack, needed a dexterous speaker in the domain of finance. In the second place Chancellors of the Exchequer, unlike Secretaries of State, are not required to hover about the Court, and Derby, who could not believe that Disraeli, in his capacity of genius, might even learn to be a courtier, was thus relieved of one of his anxieties.

Disraeli, after the first shock, accepted the situation with philosophy. "Now we have got a status," he kept repeating to Lord Malmesbury. As Mr. Herbert Paul remarks in his *History of Modern England*, Lord Malmesbury, no doubt with full justification, thought he had one before.

CHAPTER X

DR. STUART REID, in his *Life* of Lord John Russell, characterises the first Derby Government's tenure of office as "not only brief but inglorious." It began, of course, without a majority, and a General Election in the summer of 1852 failed to give it one. On the issue of Free Trade or Protection the Cabinet was hopelessly divided, and this indecision on a fundamental matter earned it contempt.

"It gives Me pleasure," ran a passage in the Speech from the Throne, "to be enabled, by the blessing of Providence, to congratulate you on the generally improved condition of the country, and especially of the industrial classes." A period of prosperity had begun. Disraeli had no faith that it would be permanent, but he had to deal with things and with people as they were. Three years earlier he had told the manufacturers :

Believe me, I speak not as your enemy when I say that it will be an exception to the principles which seem hitherto to have ruled society if you can succeed in maintaining the success at which you aim without the possession of that permanence and stability which the territorial principle alone can afford. Although you may for a moment flourish after their destruction, although your ports may be filled with shipping, your factories smoke on every plain, and your forges flame in every city, I see no reason why you should form an exception to that which the page of history has mournfully recorded, why you, too, should not fade like the Tyrian dye, and moulder like the Venetian palaces.

Many a hostile foreigner has compared modern England with Carthage. Disraeli, a friendly foreigner, was less likely than the native to think such a similitude fantastic. If in 1849 he doubted whether a prosperity not rooted in the soil could endure, he was not likely

to have changed his opinion in 1852. As a thinker his vision ranged over, so to speak, geological periods of political time. As a party leader, however, he had to take thought of nothing more distant than the morrow, and experience had taught him that it was idle to ask the English middle classes to look beyond "the coming quarter-day." But such philosophy is apt to be misunderstood, and when he made his financial statement in the April of 1852, his acceptance of facts led the agriculturists to believe that they really were, as John Bright styled them, "deluded dupes."

"His speech of two hours," wrote Palmerston,¹ "was excellent, well arranged, clear, and well delivered, but it made out the complete success of the financial and commercial measures of the last ten years, of the Peel and of the Whig administrations. . . . He was vociferously cheered by Liberals and Peelites, but listened to in sullen silence by the supporters of the Government." Sir Charles Wood declared that he had provided "what we on this side of the House consider a triumphant case for the policy which we have advocated." Bright remarked that he had "stood forth to bless the policy which he had so often censured." Disraeli, however, had to bear the responsibility for insincerities which were not his own. Derby, on taking office, had two straightforward courses before him. He could have appealed immediately to the country as a Protectionist, or he could have carried on after a frank announcement that circumstances admitted of no change in fiscal policy. The former course, for which the genuine country party stood, would almost certainly have implied defeat. But the latter course, for which Disraeli pressed both in public and in private, was repugnant to the Prime Minister, who could not bring himself frankly to abandon a policy which he would not straightforwardly pursue, and a few days after the Budget speech he took occasion of a City banquet to hint that his Chancellor of the Exchequer must not be taken too seriously. Sticking by one's guns may be

¹ Ashley's *Life of Lord Palmerston*.

honourable even when it is not politic. But carefully to spike one's own guns is foolish, and to maintain the useless battery as a mark for an enemy fully aware that no shot will be fired is unfair to one's own gunners. Disraeli, disappointed of a fight when the chances were not unfavourable, saw commonsense in a retreat when resistance had become hopeless. But no doubt he would not have blenched had the commander's trumpet emitted a more certain sound. As things were he had every reason to complain of a chief who would neither fight nor run away.

The appeal to the country was left until the autumn, but even then the issue between Free Trade and Protection was left practically open. Disraeli's address was purely opportunist :

The time has gone when the injuries which the great producing interests endure can be alleviated or removed by a recurrence to the laws which, previously to 1846, protected them from such calamities. The spirit of the age tends to free intercourse, and no statesman can disregard with impunity the genius of the epoch in which he lives.

When politicians introduce "the spirit of the age" it is a safe assumption that they are taking a course for which little argument can be found beyond expediency. Disraeli himself has provided the best commentary on his own surrender. It may be found in one of the most striking passages in *Coningsby* :

"The spirit of the age," said Sidonia, "is the very thing that a great man changes."

"But does he not rather avail himself of it?" inquired Coningsby.

"Parvenus do," rejoined his companion, "but not prophets, great legislators, great conquerors. They destroy, and they create."

"But what is an individual," exclaimed Coningsby, "against a vast public opinion?"

"Divine," said the stranger.

Disraeli, when he wrote this, might be reckoned a prophet. A few months in office, and a few years of

party leadership, had brought him to the level of a parvenu. But while he was thus acknowledging his readiness to recognise the public opinion which he had characterised as undivine in comparison with creative genius, Herries, Christopher, and other members of the Government were issuing frankly Protectionist manifestoes. Once again, it would seem, a Conservative Government resembled an "organised hypocrisy," this time with more hypocrisy than organisation.

The result of a divided appeal was naturally failure. The Conservatives gained a seat or two ; but in England the parties were almost equal, and the Irish, who had come to be known as "the Pope's Band," held the balance of power. The one thing certain was that the country had not given a majority for Protection, and in view of the ambiguous fiscal references in the Queen's Speech Villiers put down a motion declaring the repeal of the Corn Laws to have been "just, wise, and beneficial." These "three odious epithets," as Disraeli called them, could not possibly be accepted, and, in order to keep the Government alive until it had produced its Budget, Palmerston suggested an amendment nothing different in effect but less wounding to Tory susceptibilities.

This Disraeli cheerfully accepted. Its effect was to heap further sods on the grave of Protection, but it did not insult the mourners: the duller kind of squire could even go home after the ceremony and talk of a possible resurrection. For Disraeli, however, the business was bitter. Granby, in contemptuous wrath, asked why he did not pay personal tribute to the memory of Peel. Sidney Herbert, pointing to the Treasury Bench, exclaimed, "If you want to see humiliation, which, God knows, is always a painful sight, you have only to look there." But, happily for himself, Disraeli was gifted with a fortitude all his own. He had not, after all, been born for nothing member of a race which feels taunts and gibes like any other, and avenges them in its good time, but seldom lets temper lose a chance of profit. His Jewish gaberdine might be

sullied, but the main thing was that he had saved his skin. For that he had to thank Palmerston, and the very next day he made a "formal proposal" to that statesman that he should join the Government. The leadership of the House could no longer serve as a bribe, as the Prince Consort, in a letter to Derby, had vetoed any such arrangement; and in any case the prospect would have offered little temptation to Palmerston. He refused co-operation, and with the shadow of defeat on him Disraeli went forward to his second Budget. There was still one resource, an alliance with the Irish. Their price for support was the adoption of a Bill giving Irish tenants compensation for improvements, and according to Mr. Paul,¹ "it is probable, though not certain, that Mr. Disraeli consented to this bargain." Undoubtedly he was approached, undoubtedly he negotiated as in 1846, and his personal assent to Irish proposals may almost be taken for granted. But Derby would not buy allies at the cost of tampering with the rights of property.

Thus it was in a mood of profound discouragement that he introduced his Budget at the beginning of December. Macaulay² describes the speech as "lucid, but much too long." "I could have said the whole," he proceeds, "as clearly, or more clearly, in two hours; and Disraeli was up five. The plan was nothing but taking money out of the pockets of people in towns and putting it into the pockets of growers of malt."

This was, of course, the "revision of taxation" promised in Disraeli's address to the Buckinghamshire electors. But it in no sense constituted a revision to satisfy the country party, while it was naturally unpopular with the urban populations. Thus there was nobody to defend it, and the Whig historians, who have chiefly had the writing of history, have fallen into the habit of stigmatising Disraeli's winter Budget as the worst on record. It must in fairness, however, be admitted that something had to be done for the agri-

¹ *History of Modern England.*

² *Trevelyan, Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay.*

culturist, that the towns could well afford to pay, and that a simple remission of taxation was impossible. England was then in a state of rather inexplicable panic over Napoleon, and the very centre of alarm was the Court. The Queen and the Prince Consort both insisted on expensive military and naval preparations, for which Disraeli, to his deep chagrin, had to find money. He realised, as did Lord Malmesbury, the Foreign Secretary, that the scare was nonsensical. But when nonsense, first invading the heads of a few powerful people, gets possession of the multitude, it is omnipotent. The Press was raving, the Services were clamorous, Tennyson wrote a poem in which he spoke of war as "this French God, the child of hell," and Englishmen were implored to remember the designs which were frustrated at Waterloo.

In some sense, indeed, critics of his Budget might be likened to those whom Lord Morley once described as crying for "better bread than can be made of political wheat." Wood, Goulburn, and Graham brought their heaviest batteries to bear on the Government's proposals. Disraeli, in reply, used financial arguments sparingly, and put his main trust in weapons no other man could use so well. Wood he reminded that "petulance is not sarcasm, nor insolence invective." For Graham he expressed "a great regard but not a great respect." Goulburn he styled a "weird Sybil." "I have," he concluded, "to face a coalition. The combination may be successful. A coalition before this has been successful. But coalitions, though successful, have always found this: that their triumph has been brief. England does not love coalitions." There was some audacity in this reproach uttered by one whose path had so far been strewn with the wrecks of abortive attempts to form the most unlikely combinations. But the speech and wit of the cornered leader told, and if many of his followers thought little of his revision of taxation they were heartened by the gallantry of his counter-attack, by his rattling volleys of invective, and his sharp stabs of satire.

Disraeli did not sit down until one in the morning. Despite the lateness of the hour Gladstone at once rose for the final word. It was a moment of drama, the beginning of the long duel that was to end only with Disraeli's life. Gladstone was now forty-three. His parts had long been recognised; his character was, perhaps, less perfectly apprehended. As long back as 1844 Malmesbury had described him as "a man much spoken of who will come to the front"; Macaulay's reference to him as the "rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories" was, of course, of much earlier date. With every Session his superb equipment as a speaker, whether in exposition, or in defence, or in attack, had more nearly approached perfection, but there was still at this time, as Lord Morley noted—indeed the characteristic was never lost—often something "vague, ambiguous, and obscure" in his literary and oratorical form. In office, talent and industry had been revealed, and there were some observers who even so early had formed the view that, of all the Whigs, he was least unlikely to turn out a "thorough-going man of the people." Yet Disraeli, generally so quick in his estimate of the talents of others, had curiously misunderstood and under-rated him. "He may have an *avenir*, but I doubt it," he had written when Gladstone left Peel's Government over the Maynooth question. Possibly an Anglican who took his religion quite seriously as a religion was as much beyond Disraeli's mental grasp as an Englishman who, like Melbourne, took his sports seriously as sports. But later he made a still more singular mistake. Gladstone he imagined was not unsympathetic to himself—Gladstone, who had written to a Peelite friend of Disraeli as "at once the necessity of Lord Derby and his curse."

There were, indeed, no two people less qualified to appreciate each other. Disraeli might be pardoned if he looked on Gladstone's success in politics as the triumph of a first-class digestion and a second-class conscience. Gladstone, blind to the deeper sincerities of Disraeli, quite naturally took the most adverse view of his

superficial inconsistencies. Gladstone suffered from what Lord Morley politely calls "a really embarrassed judgment," unless some purely material thing like a Budget were in question; in less courtly phrase, he never knew precisely where he was going, but, gifted in unusual measure with the faculty of self-deception, he always persuaded himself, as he tried to persuade others, that when groping in a fog along the lines of least resistance, he was marching forward with head erect in full sunlight towards the realisation of steadfastly cherished ideals. Hence that passion, noted by his biographer, for proving that "two propositions, thought by plain men to be directly contradictory, were all the time capable on close construction of being presented in perfect harmony." This may or may not be "better than the front of brass that takes any change of opinion for matter-of-course expedient, as to which the least said will be soonest mended." But such a disposition was obviously calculated to make its possessor unjust to a man of Disraeli's mentality. On the other hand, Disraeli, who seldom lied to himself, though he sometimes fibbed to other people, naturally tended to misunderstand one who sought comfort in verbal refinements and could, in the words of a cynical but friendly critic, never confess to having an ace up his sleeve without suggesting that Providence had placed it there. To Gladstone, Disraeli was simply a cynical opportunist. To Disraeli Gladstone lacked nothing of the Jesuit except the Jesuit's fixed philosophy.

The opening sentence of the future Liberal Prime Minister showed something more positive than dislike—the sort of horror that never wholly vanished from Gladstone's mind when he spoke or thought of Disraeli. To him there was "something devilish," as he once said, in his great antagonist. What he really meant was, no doubt, something unashamed. To Gladstone, wrapped up in his decent compromises, it was the alien frankness of Disraeli that appalled. There was something ungentlemanly, the more keenly felt by an English gentleman of rather recent standing, in the

carelessness with which the great Jew cut across the proprieties, whether of political thought or of Parliamentary conduct. Gladstone could tolerate, if he did not approve, the pagan aristocrat; his reverence for aristocracy balanced his aversion from paganism. He could feel, or at least persuade himself that he felt, a due respect for the right-thinking plebeian. In dealing with people like John Bright he might never wholly forget that they were still in trade, while the shop was definitely behind himself. He might think that Bright would have been the better for less of Rochdale and something of Christ Church. But then Bright knew his place, and had the kind of conscience Gladstone could plumb and the kind of brilliance which did not offend his taste. Most things in Bright he could stand and understand. What he could neither stand nor understand was the kind of brilliance and the kind of honesty represented in Disraeli. Here was a man from nowhere who moved easily in every society, who talked to kings with the nonchalance of an old courtier, who manipulated dukes with a lack of reverence Gladstone never attained to his latest day, who had no trace of middle-class embarrassment, who quoted the classics (not quite in the authentic Front Bench manner, it is true), who carelessly coined epigrams which delighted all but everybody, who rode to hounds, who quickly got on excellent terms with great ladies, who, in short, knew how to "behave"—and yet was not quite the real thing. There was no gainsaying his social and Parliamentary talent. It could not even be denied that he was in his way a gentleman. But it was the Satanic way, and the devil was never at Christ Church.

Here also was a man who said and wrote all sorts of unpopular things, who had stood by lost causes until they were clearly lost, who had told the truth on many subjects as no other English tongue or pen had said it, and who might yet on occasion do things—and much worse, admit them—which were deadly political sins in Gladstone's eyes. A duller, a more dissembling, or a more humble Disraeli might be pardoned. But what

could one say of a person who, born in Bloomsbury and educated no one knows where, jeered at Oxford, laughed at the pedants, and questioned the pedigrees of the nobility—and who did all this with the easy swagger of one who breathes naturally the air of “gilded salons”? Gladstone might have admitted excuses for most of Disraeli’s intimates of the Blessington days; the most rackets of them were at least classifiable as gentlemen. But Disraeli was not only a bad man; he could not come within the widest definition of the English gentleman as Gladstone understood that product of civilisation. Gladstone was undoubtedly a good man; he was still more certainly an English gentleman; he was more certainly still a man of rather unhumorous temperament. In each character he loathed Disraeli; and all his goodness, his gentility, and his lack of humour spoke when—in the very rhythm of Serjeant Buzfuz—he reproved Disraeli for having dared to speak lightly of substantial and solemn people:

I must tell the right honourable gentleman that whatever he has learned—and he has learned much—he has not yet learned the limits of discretion, of moderation, and of forbearance, that ought to restrain the conduct and language of every Member of this House, the disregard of which is an offence in the meanest among us, but is of tenfold weight when committed by the leader of the House of Commons.

Towards four o’clock the division was taken. The Government was defeated by 190, and lost no time in recognising the situation. Disraeli, in announcing the decision to resign, expressed regret if any words that had escaped him had hurt the feelings of Members. He apologised, says Lord Morley, “with infinite polish and grace.” It should be added that there was polish and grace of another kind in the attacks which were so charmingly excused. The only difficulty was that it was a foreign polish and an exotic grace.

Disraeli’s first term of office had certainly not

sufficed to establish his reputation as a statesman. But it had shown his quality as an adroit party leader. At variance with his chief in the House of Lords, an object of suspicion at Court, without even a nominal majority in the House of Commons, constantly fearing something approaching revolt in the ranks of his own followers, he had for months avoided calamity. With a war party as wide almost as the country he had kept peace with France. The temptation, so strong with a miserably weak Administration, of buying popularity by a "spirited foreign policy" had been honourably resisted; and for this the credit must be shared between Disraeli and Malmesbury. The latter, who knew Napoleon, knew also that the last thing he could desire was a quarrel with England; and Disraeli, putting aside his partiality for the Orleans family, gave the Foreign Secretary his full support. Following here his general principle that British relations with foreign powers should not be coloured by preference for this or that form of government, he was also clear-minded enough to resist the very common English feeling that Napoleon was not quite respectable. If he were an upstart, he was one with a name that had been heard, and Disraeli realised the dangerous folly of treating as a vulgar brigand the inheritor of the tradition of the eagles.

One curious incident of the session of 1852 is worth notice. It was the year of the Duke of Wellington's death, and to Disraeli fell the obligation of making a set speech of panegyric. The theme was not, perhaps, exactly to his taste. It is to be doubted whether he rated the Duke as highly as did most Englishmen. He could admire warriors, but his imagination was impressed only by the great captains of antiquity or by those military adventurers of modern times who were much more than men of arms. The purely professional soldier did not attract him, and in Wellington's political career, as his novels show, he found little to admire. Probably, therefore, he regarded the eulogy as a tiresome piece of routine added to the other worries

of a leader. Whatever the case, his peroration was simply an unacknowledged quotation from the panegyric pronounced by Thiers on St. Cyr, of which a translation had appeared some four years earlier in the *Morning Chronicle*. This translation, it seems, had been made by George Smythe, to whom Disraeli had at a still earlier date pointed out the original as he had copied it out in a commonplace book. The accusation of a blundering theft from a daily newspaper cannot be sustained. Disraeli was, no doubt, entirely unaware that the thing had ever appeared in print in England. There remains, however, the appropriation from Thiers. Did Disraeli borrow Thiers' words knowingly? Or did he believe that the eloquent tribute, so suitable for the occasion, so long unused among his manuscripts, was his own? Things as strange do happen, and there is reason to believe that Disraeli was one of those to whom they are likely to happen. Years before he had plagiarised Macaulay. In the first edition of *Venetia* appears the sentence, "no spectacle is so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality," without a hint that this remark appeared originally in Macaulay's essay on Byron. Such a theft could not possibly be intentional. In the first place, the thing was not worth stealing. There is no profundity in the reflection, no particular distinction in the wording; Disraeli, in his most fatigued moments, could have done as well or better himself. Secondly, the source was as well known as the Bank of England, and a theft from Macaulay was of all literary larcenies the most liable to be detected and stigmatised by Disraeli's political enemies. In this case, therefore, we have clearly nothing more than unconscious plagiarism. The reproduction of a long passage is a stranger matter, and in the case of an ordinary man it would be difficult to believe that he could be so deceived as to quote almost word for word without suspecting that he was indebted both for thought and diction to another. But Disraeli was a very remarkable man, and it is less easy to believe him a mere fool than to

conceive of him as the victim of a memory at once preternaturally strong and strangely weak.

Including the pick of the Whigs and Peelites, the Government which followed Disraeli's was strong on paper. In fact it was extraordinarily feeble, for Lord Aberdeen, the Prime Minister, had neither control over his Ministers nor authority with Parliament. Nor had he the easy good nature which enables some inferior men, by engaging the affections of able colleagues, to prosper in undertakings beyond their own abilities. For one who had seen so much of the world, and had enjoyed so much intimacy with foreign courts, "the travelled thane, Athenian Aberdeen," was singularly lacking in the arts of management. In Scotland he ruled his estates like the despotic chief of a past age, and at Westminster he conceived that a modification of this manner was the best means of hiding the real infirmity of his will and the mediocrity of his understanding. The phrase, "antiquated imbecility," applied to his policy in the past by Palmerston and now revived by Disraeli, was sufficiently apt.

The Cabinet, however, started with advantages. It enjoyed Court favour; the reputations of most of its members were fair; and while Palmerston won the regard of the more robust type of Englishman, Russell, Graham, Herbert, and Gladstone appealed either to the idealists or to that large section of the Victorian public which reposed its faith in debating ability and high solemnity of manner and profession. Even more important was the disheartened temper of the Opposition. "The Tories," according to Ashley's *Life of Lord Palmerston*, "were discontented with their House of Commons leader. They further had been so demoralised by recent party circumstances as to have come to doubt all political morality, and to regard statesmen as mere party swordsmen." This, no doubt, was true of the Old Guard, which had seen Protection betrayed by Peel and abandoned by Peel's destroyer.

The younger men, headed by Disraeli, were not less discontented with Derby, whose gout, after interfering with his work during the Session, spared him for Goodwood and the grouse.

While the Government had most of the vices of any coalition, with some sources of weakness peculiarly its own, while the Opposition was smitten with indecision and enfeebled by divided counsels, the country was in a mood which would have tested the highest statesmanship. The main objection to what is labelled *Pacifism* is that *Pacificists* are commonly the most quarrelsome of mankind. England in the 'fifties was profoundly unmilitary in temper and full of ideas of universal peace. But seldom has the nation been in its practical conduct more recklessly bellicose. All countries in which wealth and population are rapidly increasing tend to truculent intolerance, and "unexampled prosperity" had decidedly gone to England's head. Contempt of all foreign peoples, with the possible exception of the Germans, was preached by almost every literary man except Dickens, and we have only to refer to the French studies of so generally urbane a writer as Thackeray, or to the topical verses of so considerable a poet as Tennyson, to realise how far the ordinary citizen must have been from appreciating the true position of the world, and of England in the world. Our potential military strength was of course then, as always, great. Our actual resources were not far short of contemptible. Yet our Ministers acted, and the people urged them to act, as if a perfectly equipped army of a million could be landed anywhere in Europe at a fortnight's notice. Palmerston's is the name generally associated with this recklessness, and Palmerston certainly did not always temper resolution with discretion. But at any rate he knew, roughly speaking, what he was about, and bullied only those towards whom the 'Ercles vein could safely be employed. The worst trouble was with men who are regarded as miracles of discretion, and some of whom have earned a special reputation as lovers of peace. As for the

public, it was only happy when a minatory Ministerial finger was wagged at this or that foreign bogey. It seemed resolved on quarrels with everybody and about everything. The first was with the Pope, who could not conveniently be fought. Then came the more serious outburst against Napoleon, and Palmerston, idolised while he shook Britannia's sword, like that of St. Stephen of Hungary, at every point of the compass, was greeted with execration when he decided to be civil to a foreign ruler by way of a change. The Derby Government, to its credit, had improved relations with France for a time, but after its fall there was a speedy relapse, and two of the Coalition Ministers especially distinguished themselves by the success with which they rivalled in Parliament the vituperative vigour of the leader-writers. Graham called Napoleon "a despot who had trampled on the liberties of forty millions." Wood denounced him for having gagged the Press, suppressed liberty, and destroyed the rights of free speech.

Aberdeen, though very nearly what would now be called a Pacificist, could not keep his fire-eaters in order, and the task of reproving them fell to Disraeli. "A good and cordial understanding with the French," he said, should be "the cardinal point of sound statesmanship"; yet here were these two Ministers, who owed their position in the Cabinet to the reputation of being "safe," holding up the Emperor of the French to execration :

Let Parliamentary reform, let the ballot, be open questions, if you please ; let every institution in Church and State be open questions ; but at least let your answer to-night prove that among your open questions you are not going to make an open question of the peace of Europe.

"Of devilish malignity, quite reckless, and shamelessly profligate," wrote Greville of this speech. The criticism to unbiased ears sounds strangely ; yet most Liberal writers have taken Greville's view. Disraeli, they held, had but one object, to embarrass the Government, while as to effect the only result was further to

embitter Anglo-French relations by setting Ministerial indiscretions in a strong light. This, of course, is common form in political criticism. There never yet was a statesman who counselled consideration and courtesy, or reproved their contraries, who was not told that he had "encouraged the enemy" or added in some way to his country's difficulties. To those who now approach the utterance without prejudice it would seem that the speech was altogether creditable to the speaker, that it was inspired by a wisdom which, unfortunately, was to forsake Disraeli at a later period, and that, while it conceivably did some good, it could not possibly have wrought mischief.

Only a few months were to pass before the Cabinet had concluded an alliance with the man whom two of its most prominent members had been permitted to revile. Napoleon had shown that he would not go to war with England if he could possibly help it. Since the Gallic cock would not fight, the Russian bear had to serve, and it was baited throughout 1853 and up to the actual declaration of war in the following year. As critic of the Government Disraeli was at this time most effective with his pen, which he employed on the *Press*, a weekly review which he had founded as the organ of what may be described as left-wing Toryism. Here he maintained a running fire of adverse comment on the imbecile diplomacy of the Government, with its "despatches, protests, ultimatums, proclamations; notes, parting, explanatory, and circular; orders for admirals to act and to be inert; combined fleets and contradictory allies." His own view was practically that of Palmerston, who, had he been at the Foreign Office, would have been firm with Russia throughout, and might have prevented war. For a Cabinet which threatened, and yet gave the impression that it would not make good its threats, Disraeli had only contempt, and he seems to have even contemplated at this time joint action with the Manchester Radicals. Palmerston

was for vigour; Cobden for non-intervention. Each had a policy which, good or bad, was definite and intelligible, whereas Aberdeen behaved like "a maundering witch." Derby meanwhile confined his interest to an occasional attempt to curb his lieutenant's activities, and the country in due time "drifted into war."

Once declared, Disraeli described it as a "just" war. But he added that it was "unnecessary" and that it was "a Coalition war." Russell or Palmerston, or even Aberdeen with a congruous Government, might, in his view, have kept the peace which the three together were bound to break. Coalitions cannot guide public passions, but must be guided by them, for the chief common aim among their members is the retention of office, and they dare not be unpopular.

Disraeli, according to one of his former Cabinet colleagues, was "furious" with the war because for a time it made the Coalition popular and withdrew attention from the various domestic issues on which he had designed to challenge it. Through the *Press* he had been trying to impart a democratic tinge to the party doctrines, and, but for the Crimea, there might have been a revival of Young England, in a less picturesque and certainly a more practical form. Carlyle had in the beginning adjured Young England to "fling its shovel hat into the lumber-room" and "cast its purple stockings to the nettles." Disraeli, with new associates, was ready to act on this advice. With the ordinary solid Conservatives he could do nothing; he thought them fools, and they had their own opinion of him. Bentinck, the one exception, had been gifted with the extreme simplicity which is very near to wisdom. Disraeli thought he saw his hope in a rising generation which he could educate. In the 'fifties youth still had its dreams touched by poetry, but the Byronic influence, which had worked in High Tories and High Churchmen as well as in Republicans, had given way to the impulse of Tennyson's "Ode sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition."

By strange chance the representative young man of the decade was young Lord Stanley, Derby's heir, and on his entry into politics he had attached himself not to his father, but to Disraeli. Stanley, in retrospect, seems a dull and rather priggish person, but his sincere belief in Victorian enlightenment and progress caused him, as a young man, to be regarded as something very much more than he really was. The *Press*, in which he was closely associated with his chosen leader, proposed a fusion of Whigs and Tories against the Radical, but its articles often contained much Radical sentiment, and hands of friendship were from time to time held out to Bright and Cobden.

During the war Disraeli established a precedent which Conservative leaders have generally followed. Supporting a vigorous prosecution of hostilities, he charged the Government with feebleness and lack of foresight :

You have chosen a winter campaign, and what have been your preparations for it? In November you gave orders to build huts. You have not yet sent out the winter clothing adapted to the climate. . . . You have commenced a winter campaign in a country where it should most of all be avoided. You have commenced such a campaign—a great blunder. You have failed to provide for it; the next great blunder. The huts will arrive in January, and the furs will probably meet the sun in May.

Such strictures were abundantly justified. Gladstone admitted that the state of the Army was "matter for weeping all day and praying all night," but this, in a Peelite, seemed to show a defective appreciation of the advantages of a division of labour. There were too many people to weep, and quite enough to pray, and it was not unnaturally felt that Ministers who had pursued a diplomacy tending to war should have simultaneously taken steps to save tears and place no unnecessary burden on prayers. The Aberdeen Government fell, as it deserved to fall, on Roebuck's motion for inquiry. The Queen sent for Derby, who refused to form a Government, putting Disraeli "in a state of disgust beyond all

control.”¹ Derby had apparently convinced himself that nobody else could get a Government together, and that he would be summoned to the Royal closet a second time, when, his indispensability thus proved up to the hilt, he proposed to accept the charge. Such expectation was signally falsified; no second chance was given. Palmerston succeeded in forming a Ministry, and, with one short break, remained Prime Minister for the rest of his life. Disraeli’s “disgust” had time during those years to get controlled, but every succeeding year of waiting must have enlarged it.

Though Disraeli had no shadow of responsibility for the war, and would probably have avoided it if in power, he did not feel at any time the distaste which the alliance with Turkey produced, at least after the event, in so many Englishmen. On the eve of war Aberdeen had written of the Turkish system of government as “radically vicious and abominable.” Gladstone had used language only less strong. Many who had no sympathy with Bright’s Pacifism agreed with him in thinking Turkey “a worthless ally.” But Disraeli had no trace of such sentiment. He protested against the Porte being “lectured.” He denounced as “insolent” the advice sent by Ministers to Constantinople. He even seems to have seen something improper in Gladstone’s rather obvious statement that “the condition of Turkey was full of anxiety, misery, and perplexity.” In a speech during the last few weeks of the war he complained that “never has any country been more unfairly treated than Turkey.” There was in this attitude something innocent and natural, quite distinct from the Turcophil sentiment of some Englishmen. Disraeli did not admire the Turk on the ground that he was “a gentleman,” and, therefore, nearer the English than other races; he might or might not have thought this a point in favour of our allies. He simply did not feel the instinctive sympathy of one kind of Englishman with

¹ Lord Malmesbury’s *Diary*.

Europe and Christianity against Asia and Islam, and equally he was not affected, like another kind of Englishman, to a preference for the Moslem founded largely on contempt for what remains of Eastern Christianity. What inclined him to the Turk was simply his own Orientalism.

There were several curious illustrations of this peculiarity of the Buckinghamshire squire during the 'fifties. In 1856 England engaged in a sort of war with China. The bombardment of Canton, which could not have taken place if the chief personages on either side had had a slightly higher opinion of each other, followed an insult to the British flag, which decorated a small vessel called the *Arrow*. The *Arrow* was a Chinese boat, and had no right to display the flag, but it was enough that the flag, even though improperly used, had been insulted. The British governor of Hong-Kong used threats and displayed guns; Yeh, the mandarin in authority at Canton, thereupon offered rewards for the heads of the barbarian English. Palmerston, with an unconscious *tu quoque*, informed his constituents at Tiverton that an "insolent barbarian" had dared to menace the lives of British subjects. Tiverton, and England at large, applauded Palmerston, and though Cobden moved a vote of censure against him the Prime Minister was roughly accurate when he described his Parliamentary adversaries as "a fortuitous concourse of atoms." Some were professional opponents of war; some wanted office; some had a personal grudge to satisfy. Disraeli was probably the only Member of the House of Commons who could and did see the affair as a cultivated Chinese might have seen it. He protested against the "brutal freedom of manners" shown both by the man on the spot and by the Home Government. He explained that China was "the nation of etiquette." Though he admired Palmerston, he really seems to have regarded him as a much more authentic barbarian than the mandarin Yeh. Seen with a European background, of course, Palmerston, with his horsey good-

humour, was an aristocrat. But in contact with an immemorial Eastern civilisation he might appear to the man of another Eastern civilisation equally ancient as only one of those "flat-nosed Franks" of whom Contarini Fleming speaks with contempt as "inventing theories to account for their own incompetence"—an incompetence which is in truth explained by the fact that they are "as distinct a race from their models as they undoubtedly are from the Kalmuck and Negro!"

During the Indian Mutiny this detachment was even more remarkably displayed. From the massacre at Delhi in May, 1857, to the relief of Lucknow in November of the same year there was but one passion in England. The desire for a bloody vengeance on the brown men who had risen against the white, and had murdered white women and children, stirred primitive savagery in the mildest and most sophisticated. "I, who cannot bear to see a beast or a bird in pain," wrote Macaulay, "could look on without winking whilst Nana Sahib underwent all the tortures of Ravallac." Meanwhile Disraeli's calm was astonishing. In July he made a speech three hours long in which he reviewed the events which had led up to the "so-called mutiny"—for he was careful to insist that it was a national revolt—and produced a programme for the future. We had, he said, subverted the rule of the Indian princes merely to obtain revenue, and for the same reason had altered the laws of succession for private property:

In spite of the law of adoption, the very corner-stone of Hindu society, when a native prince died without natural heirs, though a son had been adopted as a successor, the Government of India annexed his dominions. Sattara, Bara, Jeitpore, Sumbulpore, Jhansi were monuments of nefarious acquisition, and Oude of a wholesale system of spoliation, for it had been annexed even without the pretext of a lawful failure of heirs. . . . What man was safe, what feudatory, what freeholder who had not a child of his own loins, was safe throughout India?

Again there was the question of religion. "What the Hindu regards with suspicion is the union of missionary enterprise with the political powers of the Government." The "sacred Scriptures had suddenly appeared in the schools." Women were being educated and widows allowed to marry—both unwise steps in view of "the peculiar ideas entertained by Hindus." Still worse had been the effect of the ordinances which decreed that no man should forfeit his heritage for religious apostasy, since all Indian property was regarded as a sacred trust for religious purposes:

The Mutiny was no more a sudden impulse than the income tax. . . . The decline and fall of Empires are not affairs of greased cartridges. Such results are occasioned by adequate causes and by an accumulation of adequate causes.

Finally, though force must be used to suppress the Mutiny, the people, he held, must be told that there was "a future of hope" before them:

There must be no more annexations, no more conquest. . . . It is totally impossible that you can ever govern 150,000,000 of men in India by merely European agency. . . . You ought to have a Royal Commission sent by the Queen from this country to India immediately to inquire into the grievances of the various classes. . . . Do this, and do this not in a hole-and-corner manner, but in a mode which will attract universal attention, and excite the general hope of Hindustan in the Queen's name. If that be done simultaneously with the arrival of your forces, you may depend upon it that your military advance will be facilitated, and, I believe, your ultimate success assured.

Never, perhaps, did Disraeli utter wiser words. Never did he make a speech producing less impression. His motion in favour of a Royal Commission had to be withdrawn, and without a division the House of Commons accepted Russell's resolution expressing complete confidence in the Government. Whigs and Tories were at one. The passion of the moment made men careless concerning causes and consequences alike. The temper which found satisfaction in condign punishment for its own sake, and was more interested in blowing Sepoys

from guns than in tracing past mistakes of policy, was quite explicable. We may feel admiration for Disraeli's moral courage in denouncing, almost alone among his contemporaries, the prevailing sentiment as "heinous," but in some sense the singularity of his attitude is a subject more for curious examination than for thoughtless eulogy. A humane and kind-hearted man he was assuredly—it was not calculation alone which made him champion the cause of the small helots of industry whose labour Bright was anxious to maintain at twelve hours a day—but it would be absurd to suggest that he was to Macaulay as Buddha to a Thug. There is only one possible explanation of his detachment. To the Englishman the slaughter of white women by black men, the mere handling of white women by black men, was not merely a savagery but a sacrilege. Englishmen of that day felt exactly as Americans of this day feel when a white woman is insulted or done to death by a negro. But Disraeli, being only an Englishman by political accident, could not feel just like that. The massacre of Cawnpore was very horrible, of course, but not more horrible—at any rate not much more horrible—than the kind of thing that in some measure occurred, and in some measure must occur, in every war between one white people and another. That is to say, while the quality of the deeds was hellish, they were not notably worse because those who committed them were "black men." To the Englishmen the Indian was a "black man": Lord Salisbury years after applied that epithet to a very highly cultivated Member of the British Parliament, born in India. To Disraeli, on the other hand, the Indian was not a black man at all; he was a highly civilised Oriental—a Caucasian, indeed, and therefore alien from and inferior to the chosen Arab race, to which alone God had talked, but by no means to be regarded as a barbarian by other Caucasians of more recent and perhaps more shoddy culture.

As an Oriental, also, Disraeli could feel the fallacy of the doctrine that the East is best ruled by force—if

possible, plus reason, but better by force alone than by reason alone or chiefly. He knew better. His own racial memory was there to prompt him. He was an Oriental whose fathers had been harried by inquisitions, plundered by savage barons, dispossessed by unjust laws, now exposed to the tyrannous greed of princes, now given over to the fury of popular hatred. By harshness and injustice, he understood well enough, an Eastern people could be subdued, enslaved, degraded ; its better nature could be stunted, its worst vices could be rankly forced. But for such methods, he also understood, retribution grim and stern must come, though the mills of God might be slow in their grinding. He was no clairvoyant. His vision of the future did not embrace the sinister figure of a Bolshevik Kommisar. But he realised the danger there was in the temper of 1857, and it was as a well-wisher of England that he emitted the warning he was, of all statesmen of the day, best qualified to give.

CHAPTER XI

AT the time of the Berlin Treaty Bismarck is said to have declared that Disraeli was England. It was a stupid thing to say about Disraeli, but the phrase might be quite properly used to describe the position of Palmerston during the last few years of his life.

Palmerston really belonged to no party ; his personal following in the House of Commons was assessed at two, and Disraeli on one occasion spoke of him as "the Tory chief of a Radical Cabinet." Yet year after year he remained in power, the House of Commons supporting him because the country demanded him. After Aberdeen's Coalition had fallen, even the Court was forced to swallow its distaste for the hardy veteran. The Whigs came to recognise that he was a better asset than Russell, and the Tories, comparing him with Disraeli, were often as regretful as the Irish after the Boyne that a change of kings was impossible. His only consistent adversaries were Bright and Cobden, and how completely the country was for him and against them the polls of 1857 testified. The virtual dictatorship of Palmerston is one of the most singular episodes in English history. It certainly did not represent the triumph of intellect. It is not completely explained as a triumph of character. Palmerston in old age was much as he had always been. But it just happened that for the moment he exactly coincided with the prevailing English mood, and English moods, while as uncertain as English weather, have this in common with the climate, that when drought or deluge sets in nobody knows when either will end.

Against such a man Disraeli's task as leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons was thankless indeed, and how well he played the ungrateful part was scarcely understood by his contemporaries. Tactical mistakes he occasionally made, but they were those of the man who insists on keeping his head in a mad company. In all the fits and fervours and righteous indignations into which England fell during the Palmerston epoch he refused to have part. "Nobody," says Mr. Sichel, "understood his countrymen more shrewdly at once and sympathetically than Disraeli." This judgment of an admirer has to be accepted with qualification. Disraeli's sympathy with Englishmen was often (and necessarily) imperfect. During the Chinese trouble he miscalculated public feeling, and his own nominal followers were harshly critical when he questioned the wisdom of English methods in India. But shrewd he undoubtedly was, and though he did not always realise the nature of John Bull drunk, he knew pretty well what would be his mood in sobriety and repentance.

Thus, while he neither roused the country to enthusiasm for the Conservative Party nor roused the Conservative Party to enthusiasm for himself, he kept Conservatism in being ready for the day of the completed debauch and the incipient headache. Despite his own affection for Turkey, he could judge exactly when England had had enough of the Russian War; he was the first to publish, in the *Press*, a hint that peace negotiations had begun; and while Derby was yet insisting that Russia must be beaten to her knees he was advocating the conclusion of terms. He had noticed, as any intelligent foreigner might have done, that the Victorian Englishman's pugnacity was rather an affair of the gallery than of the arena. Germans were actually enlisted to fight in the Crimea. During the Indian Mutiny there was solemn discussion over a plan for using Belgian regiments to quell the Sepoys. Disraeli knew England well enough not to misinterpret all this. He knew there was no decline in the national

spirit ; but he did infer that the mood of the country was very much that of an undergraduate "rag," and that the sense of fun would evaporate when liabilities were properly appreciated. Radical writers have noted with surprise that in the middle years of the nineteenth century Conservative influence was rather for moderation than for aggression in foreign affairs. To Disraeli more than anybody this disposition was due.

Interest in domestic politics languished while Palmerston remained despot. The Parliamentary history of the period presents few landmarks beyond the annual Budgets, and to the generation of the Great War, bending under the burden of repaying an ally and subsidising an enemy, the state of the sinking fund in the 'fifties is relatively uninteresting. On foreign policy Palmerston throve, and by it in 1858 he fell.

The defeat of the Government on the Conspiracy to Murder Bill is one of the curiosities of the nineteenth century. Palmerston loved to live dangerously—so long as it was safe. He enjoyed flouting the potentates of Europe and bullying the little nations. But a certain commonsense preserved him from really desperate follies. As an Englishman he might be no less contemptuous than Tennyson himself of the "red fool fury of the Seine." But as a statesman he realised what few even of the greatest English statesmen of the time did—that France is a very formidable Power, and has to be treated with a certain circumspection. From time to time he could not resist the temptation of small bickering, but a downright quarrel was another matter. Not many Englishmen understood this distinction, and when Orsini threw at Napoleon his bombs made in Birmingham, Palmerston was expected to maintain the usual hoity-toity attitude. Orsini was a conspirator of exceptional respectability, and had warm friends among people in England who, on the face of things, should have been least likely to approve

assassination. That he was a brave man is true ; he met his fate with undaunted fortitude. That he acted on motives which he deemed patriotic must be equally admitted. But all this may be said of dozens of political assassins whose "dastardly" deeds—no assassin can be really a poltroon—are condemned by English historians. The sympathy extended to this man partly proceeded from the fact that he had made much acquaintance among English Liberals, but still more from the almost maniacal hatred in which Napoleon was held by those politicians to whose pet theories he had shown such practical disrespect.

Lord Morley relates that when war was declared in 1870 John Stuart Mill "violently struck his chair and broke out into a passionate exclamation, 'What a pity the bombs of Orsini missed their mark, and left the crime-stained usurper alive.'" If a man of Mill's character, of his "mental discipline" and "impersonal temper" (which Morley emphasises in the very next passage), could express himself thus years after the event, it may be imagined how Liberal England felt when Palmerston, instead of expressing regret in Mill's sense, assumed an apologetic attitude to France, and proceeded to initiate legislation to make it more difficult for foreign conspirators to engineer plots of assassination on British soil. There was at once an outcry. The "right of asylum" was being endangered. The cause of liberty was being betrayed. It was none of England's business to secure the safety of foreign despots, and enable them to murder freedom with greater immunity. French colonels were writing rude things about England in the *Moniteur*. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs was making reflections on the state of English Law which permitted the shelter of people who had "put themselves outside the pale of common rights." The French Ambassador had, rather injudiciously, talked of the danger of "misunderstanding" if England did not put in motion her law, if it were strong enough, or strengthen her law, if it were too feeble. This was too much. English indignation boiled

over at the thought that Palmerston's Bill had been dictated from Paris.

Disraeli was far from taking the popular point of view, and began by giving the measure his support. After all, if Irish Fenians had used French soil as a jumping-off ground for attempts on the life of Queen Victoria, it was highly probable that many English colonels would be impolite in their references to France, and it is certain that the matter would have been mentioned by the British Ambassador in Paris. Despite the colonels, Disraeli, in the midst of all the pother, felt and said that good understanding with France was "the key and corner-stone of modern civilisation." Here spoke undoubtedly Disraeli the statesman. But by the satire of things it was ordained that Disraeli the politician should overthrow the Government whose policy in this matter he substantially approved. The Conspiracy to Murder Bill had passed its first reading by a majority of 200, Disraeli speaking and voting for it. But when it came up for second reading Milner Gibson, a Radical, moved an amendment which was in effect a vote of censure on Palmerston and a challenge to the French. This was eventually carried by 19 votes, Disraeli's support being, of course, the decisive factor. An explanation of this change of front is afforded in Ashley's *Life of Lord Palmerston*. Seated in the Peers' Gallery, Derby listened to the debate, and watched the tide rising against the Prime Minister. Convinced that he could be overthrown, he "sent hasty word to his lieutenant that they should take it at the flood which led to office," and thereupon Disraeli "plunged into the stream."

This story is given with some reserve, but there is no lack of circumstantial evidence to confirm it. During a great part of his career Disraeli had shown a cynical levity in dealing with matters of purely domestic and minor concern—his desertion of Protection may be explained quite otherwise—but he had not yet reached a time of life when he could look on foreign affairs as anything but sacred. Where the limited mind of Derby

saw but a move in the party game, his keen and broad intelligence must have perceived grave danger of war with the country whose friendship he most valued. "Friendship with France," says Mr. Sichel, "amounted with him almost to a passion." Here, of course, is exaggeration. Disraeli in public life dealt little in passions of any kind. But he was enough of an artist to like France, and far too much of a statesman not to understand what men of the Milner Gibson kind will never realise—that France is always a Great Power, and that France cannot be insulted with impunity. To Disraeli, who could see facts without prejudice, the common English conception that the French may sometimes be petted, and sometimes scolded, but always safely treated as if they were children, seemed mere imbecility. Napoleon, he quite well knew, did not want to fight England, but Napoleon, he also knew, must fight England, or be toppled off his throne, if affront passed a certain point. There was, moreover, something peculiar to himself which, apart altogether from the danger of collision with France, inclined him to favour a measure of this kind. Persons of the Orsini type were regarded by some Englishmen as misguided patriots; by others as common murderers. Disraeli saw them in neither light, but had a deep dread of their international organisation and world-wide power. *Endymion* and *Lothair* both reveal his belief in the influence of the "secret societies," and though to the matter-of-fact Englishman such credulity might seem contemptible, Disraeli as a Jew had an instinct in such matters which it would be rash to ridicule. He wrote in his *Life of George Bentinck*:

The people of God co-operate with atheists; the most skilful accumulators of property ally themselves with communists; the peculiar and chosen race touch the hand of all the scum and low castes of Europe. And all this because they wish to destroy that ungrateful Christendom which owes to them even its name and whose tyranny they can no longer endure.

The "secret societies" were full of his own people,

and it is at least likely that he had a better knowledge of them than the ordinary Member of Parliament. The Bill before the House might seem to some simply a measure to protect the life of one better dead. To Disraeli it was important not only as a means towards better relations with France, which he considered essential, but also as a safeguard against those who were aiming at the destruction of all property, religion, and culture.

Nevertheless, as a party obligation, he spoke and voted against the second reading. His defence of the change of front was lame enough to suggest a spatch-cock hastily prepared against all his convictions at the chef's imperious behest. Palmerston was defeated, and Derby became Prime Minister for the second time. He had disgusted Disraeli by his refusal to take office during the Crimean War. He had now taken an opportunity which could have given but scant satisfaction to his lieutenant. The Conservative Party had all the facts and omens against it. It had lost seats at the last election. India was an open sore. Relations with France, already extremely dangerous, could only be the more strained by the circumstances of Palmerston's overthrow. Grave trouble threatened in Italy. At home there loomed the problem of Parliamentary Reform. This Palmerston had neglected, secure in his personal ascendancy and aware how Bright, with all his oratory, had failed to interest the country. But in the inner circles of the Conservative Party there had grown up a feeling that it would be a clever thing to "dish the Whigs." Disraeli liked the idea in the abstract, but saw practical difficulties, since the main Conservative body would not stomach the only kind of reform likely to rob the Radicals of their thunder. He had already much painful experience of what it meant to "educate" the party.

The first Derby Government had been almost ridiculous in its deficiencies in talent. To remove such

reproach from the second a further attempt was made to bring back the Peelites. Colonel Peel, Sir Robert's brother, was secured by Disraeli, but brought little save his name. The Duke of Newcastle, who would have brought only his title, declined to sit in the same Cabinet with Disraeli; the true Peelite never forgot or forgave, and would most especially have no peace with Zimri, who slew his master. However, the Crimean War had damaged most Peelite reputations, and Gladstone was really the only fish worth the angling. Somewhat tardily Disraeli had come to recognise his importance, and both when the Government was in process of formation, and later, when the Board of Control fell vacant, made desperate attempts to win him. Mr. Sichel describes these overtures as "generous and magnanimous." They appeared to the late Mr. G. W. E. Russell as a snare to bring a dangerous rival into subjection. Lord Morley, however, in his *Life of Gladstone*, quotes a sentence from Disraeli which may explain much. "I may," Disraeli wrote, "be removed from the scene, or I may wish to be removed from the scene." The idea of quitting the House of Commons, to become Governor-General of India, which Mr. Russell called "grotesque," may have been most seriously entertained. Indeed, there are several considerations to suggest that Disraeli would have welcomed such an opportunity. That he wanted to get Gladstone for the Ministry there is no doubt, and it is scarcely to be imagined that he was under any illusion that Gladstone would be ready to serve under himself. Equally, of course, he could not serve under Gladstone. But Gladstone must be got if possible, for without the accession of strength he could bring the Derby Administration could only be an interlude. So, if Gladstone consented, Disraeli must look for something other than a political career. If Gladstone did not consent there was nothing for it but to face a futile and not specially dignified attempt to govern without a majority until the schism in the Opposition ranks had been healed. Disraeli in 1858 could not have been over-happy about

his political prospects, and for a dozen years he had taken little interest in England as England. On the other hand, India undoubtedly dazzled his Oriental imagination. As things fell out Gladstone refused all overtures, and Disraeli was forced to plough the sands. But had the case been otherwise, no one who has read *Tancred* can be sure that Disraeli would have regarded translation from impotence at Westminster to rule at Calcutta as a downward step.

The new Government did not last long, but, considering all its difficulties, it did better than might have been expected. The Old Guard was represented by Malmesbury, wiser than the world imagined; by Henley, difficult and suspicious; by Walpole, a respectable mediocrity; and by Lord John Manners, who had become a useful Parliamentary speaker. Lord Ellenborough, who had been at the Board of Control twenty-three years before, was once more placed in charge of Indian affairs. Colonel Peel had the War Office. The most notable recruits were Stanley, who took the Colonies, and Sir Hugh Cairns, a great orator and yet greater lawyer, who became Solicitor-General. Lord Salisbury was President of the Council, but for his much more gifted son, Lord Robert Cecil, not even an Under-Secretaryship was found. One of Derby's weaknesses was his blind eye for young talent. Disraeli, at the Exchequer, again led the House.

The first task was to wipe up the mess with France. The Government had been borne into office on a wave of anti-French fury for which it was not responsible, but of which it had availed itself. This was awkward enough, but there were worse elements in the situation. A mob of twenty thousand had shrieked for war in Hyde Park. The French Ambassador, in the presence of the Foreign Secretary, had clapped his hand on his sword. Any paltering with matters in such an atmosphere must have been fatal, and Disraeli's prompt

action, his resolute exclusion of all temptation to win popularity by sabre-rattling, did him infinite credit. Using all his tact to heal the quarrel, he was able within a week to announce that all was well. "The alliance between England and France," he said, "rests upon a principle wholly independent of forms of government, and even of the personal characters of the rulers." But he did not leave the matter so equivocally. "The Emperor," he added, "is not only a ruler but a statesman, he possesses not only great knowledge of human nature in general, but of the human nature of the Englishman in particular." The House showed no enthusiasm at the news that peace was assured. That, however, mattered little. The danger had been averted. Though the peoples raged a little longer the Governments understood each other, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say Disraeli understood the Emperor, whom he had often met at Lady Blessington's, and the Emperor, as he said, understood the English. Pelissier, Duc de Malakoff, a soldier whom the English had greatly admired in the Crimea, was appointed to the Embassy in London, and was wildly cheered when he made his first public appearance by the same people who had cried "Down with France" in Hyde Park. It is often said that under the enervating influence of softer manners and increased luxury the once stern and stoical Englishman has lost his old phlegm, and has degenerated into an emotional and flighty being of whom his fathers would be ashamed. A calm perusal of the chronicles of the 'fifties should be reassuring to those who lament a weakening of the national capacity for self-restraint and impute to the present generation a levity unknown to its predecessors.

More than one of Disraeli's biographers has remarked that he did not trust Napoleon. It was not in his nature, probably, to trust anybody. That he had a considerable admiration for the man who had adventured his way to a throne might be inferred even if he had not composed the portrait of Prince Florestan in *Endymion*; and Disraeli, like Endymion, favoured the

closest relations with France. The real obstacle to a cordial understanding lay elsewhere. Lord Derby distrusted any man with a past that was not tabulated in Debrett, or with a future not provided for in a family vault. "The only evidence," runs a passage in *Endymion*, "that the Prime Minister gave that he was conscious of this feeling (that Anglo-French intimacy should be cultivated) was an attack of gout." How often "the captain's" gout spoiled Disraeli's policies can only be surmised. As Chancellor of the Exchequer it seriously embarrassed him, for his aim was an understanding which would permit of a large measure of mutual disarmament. Derby's gout, however, was in alliance with Prince Albert's apprehensions. The Prince had returned from a courtesy visit to Cherbourg with alarming tales about naval preparations on the southern side of the Channel, and Disraeli knew by cruel experience that every attack of royal nerves must be visited on a Chancellor of the Exchequer.

In foreign policy there were three well-defined schools of thought. The first and largest was pro-Italian. Some were friends of Italy because they admired Mrs. Browning's poems, some because they liked Garibaldi's red shirt and saw his biscuits advertised, but most because the King of Sardinia had dissolved the monasteries of Piedmont. He was almost a new "Protestant Hero" in the eyes of all those Evangelicals and Nonconformists who were in the habit of translating into Continental terms their own whims and prepossessions. Apparently unaware of the irregularities of his private life, they regarded Victor Emmanuel as only wanting opportunity to give to Italy that which had made England great.

The second party was pro-Austrian, and included the Court, Lord Derby, and the respectable and unimaginative generally. The third party was pro-French, and both in numbers and in influence was the weakest of

the three, though, as Disraeli was its leading spirit, it could not be altogether unimportant. Much of his energy was devoted to efforts to stop war between France and Austria on Italian soil.

An Italian war (he said) may by possibility be a European war. The waters of the Adriatic cannot be disturbed without agitating the waters of the Rhine. The port of Trieste is not a mere Italian port; . . . an attack on Trieste is not an attack on Austria alone, but also on Germany.

He foresaw clearly that if Napoleon drew his sword in this Italian quarrel the hope of full Anglo-French accord was ended. He foresaw also that the campaign could be only the first of a series. Both fears were justified. The suspicion in the English mind that a Bonaparte must necessarily be meditating revenge for Waterloo and Trafalgar was heightened when the French came back from Italy with the glory of Magenta and Solferino on their banners and Savoy and Nice in their pockets. Mutual disarmament became at once a dream, and economy, in the desire for which Disraeli was at this time one with the Manchester Radicals, a forlorn ambition. Moreover, though Germany would fire no shot in defence of Austria, the French victories roused popular alarm and resentment all over Germany, and it is not too much to say that the seed of 1870 was sown in 1859.

Disraeli's policy was widely misunderstood, and told heavily against the Government when it appealed to the country. Because he had done his best to keep Napoleon back from war he was accused of attempting to bolster up the unpopular power of Austria. It is true that some of his colleagues had strong pro-Austrian sympathies. It is true that Italy was to Disraeli merely a land of art and sunshine, and that he cared little for the political regeneration which to Gladstone and others appealed as a sacred cause. But it is clear from his speeches alone, to speak of no other evidence, that he was guided by quite other considerations than a desire to serve the Hapsburgs. More than ten years

had passed since in the year of revolutions he had been under the influence of Metternich, and in 1858 he was working mainly for England, and incidentally for France. Friendship between the two nations, he said, would be "a conquest more valuable than Lombardy." Italy, he declared, must be liberated by her own people. On account of these sentiments he incurred the displeasure of all who admired Mrs. Browning, Garibaldi, and the King of Sardinia, but the history of the succeeding sixty years went far to justify his unpopular attitude.

On the surface, however, India occupied the chief attention of the Government during its first Session. The Mutiny had sounded the death-knell of John Company, and one of Disraeli's first cares was to introduce a Bill transferring to Whitehall the sovereign powers exercised from Leadenhall Street. One of its clauses provided for the establishment of a council to which certain members should be elected by the five largest towns in the United Kingdom, and others by retired Anglo-Indian officials resident in Great Britain. Neither franchise met with approval. The first seemed ridiculous, the second would certainly have been dangerous, and the Bill was withdrawn. Later Disraeli set himself to prepare a number of resolutions, and, to quote Mr. Herbert Paul, "prepared so many of them that very few people read them through." From these resolutions another Bill eventually emerged, and duly reached the Statute Book. Its chief enactment was the transfer of authority from the East India Company and the Board of Control to a Secretary of State in Council. With certain minor amendments, the Act worked for over half a century, when another member of the Jewish race, Mr. Edwin Montagu, demolished the work of his great predecessor. The measure was essentially Disraeli's, though Stanley's name came to be associated with it.

Parliament and the country, never vividly interested in India, in the absence of some sensational incident, watched with apathy the development of plans for its "better government." But the Government was nearly wrecked at the start by one of those personal matters which, in a polity such as ours, occasion more feeling than any difference on principle. Canning, the Governor-General, had issued a proclamation declaring that the proprietary right in the soil of the whole province of Oude was confiscated to the British Government as a punishment for rebellion, the estates of six loyal chiefs being alone excluded. Lord Ellenborough, a man of despotic and somewhat eccentric temper, who had himself been Governor-General, wrote Canning a letter of violent rebuke, which was not unjustifiable, and published it, which was perhaps unwise. The Government was at once the target of accusations strangely familiar to-day. It was pandering to traitors. It was weakening the position of the man on the spot. It was going the way to undermine an authority which depended on the awe in which the decrees of Englishmen in India were regarded ; less important was it, according to this argument, that an order should be just, moral, or even rational, than that it should be, like the acts of God, unanswerable and uncontrolled. Though Ellenborough, who had acted without consulting his colleagues, resigned, a heavy breeze still blew. But suddenly came the news that Sir James Outram, one of the military heroes of the Mutiny, had also taken objection to the course pursued by Canning, and immediately the critics of the Government beat a hasty retreat. Disraeli did not spare his routed foes. The editor of *The Times* and other journalists who had drawn their inspiration from Lady Palmerston's receptions were attacked as "once stern guardians of popular rights" who "simpered in the enervated atmosphere of gilded salons." The excellent but pietistical Lord Shaftesbury was compared to "Gamaliel himself with broad phylacteries upon his forehead." To his constituents in Buckinghamshire Disraeli described the

collapse of the Opposition in the House of Commons in one of his most famous figures :

It was like a convulsion of nature rather than an ordinary transaction of human life. I can only liken it to one of those earthquakes which take place in Calabria and Peru. There was a rumbling murmur, a groan, a shriek, a sound of distant thunder. No one knew whether it came from the top or bottom of the House. There was a rent, a fissure in the ground, and then a village disappeared, then a tall tower toppled down, and the whole of the Opposition benches became one dissolving view of anarchy.

In this Session also was passed the Act of Parliament which opened the House of Commons to Jewish members by allowing them to omit the words, "on the true faith of a Christian," when they took the oath. The Bill had been frequently passed by the Commons, and as often rejected by the Lords. Its recurrent appearance was a serious annoyance to Disraeli. The majority of his party opposed it, and he himself would have been extremely happy to let the question sleep. Apart from the embarrassment to himself, he seems to have been convinced that the Jewish race would derive no benefit from trying to force itself into visible politics. Isaac of York was quick to deprecate Prince John's command that he should assert a social and political equality with people he could have bought up in bulk. That, Disraeli seems to have thought, was the wise course for the kings of Jewry. But since the greatest king among them, Baron Rothschild himself, insisted on getting elected for the City of London, he could no longer play the Laodicean. It must have been a profound satisfaction to him when the wretched measure was safely on the Statute Book. At the very last he had heard himself quoted against it, the great Protestant champion, Mr. Newdegate, discovering a new objection to the House of Israel because it was written in *Coningsby* that the first Jesuits were Jews.

For the rest, Disraeli in his Budget imposed a stamp duty on cheques, and carried a Bill to purify the Thames.

If his more lauded achievements have vanished these things still remain. Cheques are still stamped, and cholera still leaves London alone.

The next Session—1859—saw the introduction of the first Conservative Reform Bill. Some years earlier one of Disraeli's followers, Henry Drummond, conspicuous for his old-fashioned dress and his zeal for the Irvingite religion, but esteemed a person of some sagacity, had written to him :

Your chief rock ahead is Reform. Johnny (Russell) can upset you whenever he pleases ; but he will not please unless he can ensure his being sent for by the Queen, and not Palmerston. . . . You must have some Bill *in petto* ready at a moment's notice to lay on the table of the House.¹

With this letter was enclosed the draft of a suggested measure, which was freely circulated among the party. It is quite wrong to believe that Derby and Disraeli, either in 1859 or in 1867, sprang Reform on a startled and unprepared party. For years there had been an understanding that "something would have to be done." Drummond, an ordinary Tory except on Sundays, was ready for household suffrage, but there were many not prepared to go so far ; and there were still more who, while realising that Reform was not less inevitable than death, were of opinion that, like death, it should be postponed as long as possible. So far as the leaders were concerned Reform meant no abandonment of principle. Derby had been a Whig in the days of Lord Grey, Disraeli had been some sort of Radical ; and it could be argued that in introducing a Reform Bill they were merely putting their early professions into practice.

In the 'forties Disraeli had complained that the 1832 settlement "took the qualification of property in too hard and rigid a sense as the only qualification which should exist in this country for the exercise of political

¹ *Quarterly Review*, October, 1895.

rights." In the early 'fifties he had asked: "Is the possession of the franchise to be a privilege, the privilege of industry and public virtue, or is it to be the right of everyone, however degraded, however indolent, however unworthy?" And he had answered: "Let it be the privilege of the civic virtues." The Bill he and Derby produced in 1859 was in accordance with these declarations. The county franchise was to be reduced to £10, by which it was calculated that 200,000 voters would be added. At the same time fresh qualifications for the suffrage were proposed, such as an annual income of £10 from the funds, £60 in the savings bank, a State pension, a university degree, and membership of a learned profession. On the other hand, in order to prevent rural districts being swamped by urban influence, some 100,000 "forty-shilling freeholders" in the boroughs were to lose their votes for the counties. The aim was to obtain a balance between town and country, between property and population, and to maintain privilege by extending it. Disraeli was already prepared to go further, introducing a measure based on household suffrage, but to this the majority of his colleagues would not consent, and he bowed to their decision.¹

To imagine that, then or afterwards, he was moved by any of the ordinary arguments for Reform used by Whigs and Radicals would be utterly to misunderstand the workings of his mind. He was not deceived by the fancy that a theoretically just balance of voting power implies equal influence for each vote in the government

¹ He asserted, in 1867, that he had actually proposed such a measure to the Cabinet in 1859. Though this statement is unconfirmed, it is quite credible. Probably the suggestion was thrown out in a manner permitting of easy retreat, and nothing more was said when it became apparent that it was unwelcome. Palmerston called Disraeli "a democrat covered by the skin of a Conservative," and said that he was looking for popularity "out of doors." The aristocracy, apart from a few broad-minded Dukes, still despised him for his origin. The middle classes took long to forgive him his attacks on Peel and his defence of the Corn Laws. On the other hand, there was no prejudice against him in a lower social stratum, and the enfranchisement of the working class, he cannot but have felt, might be personally advantageous to him.

of the nation. His real views are well expressed in the following :

The City of London, the City proper, is richer than Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham put together. . . . It is richer than Bristol, Leeds, Newcastle, Sheffield, Hull, Bradford, Wolverhampton, Brighton, Stoke-upon-Trent, Nottingham, Greenwich, Preston, East Retford, Sunderland, York, and Salford combined, towns which return among them no less than thirty-one Members. Yet the City of London has not asked me for thirty-one Members. . . . The power of the City of London, or that of the City of Manchester, in this House is not to be measured by the honourable and respectable individuals whom they send here to represent their opinions.

Disraeli's ideas on representation have often been ridiculed, but they seem to have been as commonsense as they were unconventional. Were the City of London to be wholly disfranchised its political influence would not be appreciably reduced, and though it returns only two Members to the House of Commons its political authority exceeds that of a score of Walthamstows or Willesdens. Disraeli saw quite clearly that there can be no political equality between men economically unequal; and if he were ready to grant household suffrage at this time it was because he grasped the truth that every extension of the franchise tends to make government less and not more democratic.

The House of Commons (he said in reply to some proposal for further extension of the suffrage) will lose as a matter of course its hold on the executive. . . . Well, then, what happens? We fall back on a bureaucratic system. . . . Your administration would be carried on by a Court Minister, perhaps by a Court minion.

That Disraeli discerned anything very alarming in such a prospect is unlikely. But his predictions have been exactly fulfilled. With each extension of the franchise the House of Commons has lost some of its hold on the executive. We have "fallen back on bureaucracy," and Disraeli himself came very near to being a Court Minister when some fifteen years

later an extended franchise had given him a submissive House of Commons. If, therefore, he did not think the Bill of 1859 went far enough, it was assuredly not because he had any passion for democracy as expressed through the voting-booth. It was rather because he saw less danger to the State in a degraded franchise and a bureaucratic despotism than in the continuance of Parliamentary government under the decay of aristocracy.

The Bill of 1859 had few friends, and there were difficulties in the Cabinet before it was introduced. Stanley threatened resignation because he considered it "insufficient";¹ and Spencer Walpole and Henley actually left the Government, "the former," according to Malmesbury,² "because we go too far, the latter because we don't go far enough." Disraeli, with no particular attachment for the Bill, employed all his art to smooth away difficulties. His fidelity to Derby was a great deal more than that shifty politician deserved. There is Malmesbury's word for it that he "behaved beautifully," though on him more than any other member of the Cabinet fell the wrath of those Tories to whom any kind of reform was hateful. He was assumed to be the tempter and seducer, and how bitterly he was hated by some of his nominal followers may be gathered from an article contributed to the *Quarterly Review* in 1860 by Lord Robert Cecil, afterwards, as Lord Salisbury, his Foreign Minister:

To crush the Whigs by combining with the Radicals was the first and last maxim of Mr. Disraeli's Parliamentary tactics. . . . He had never procured the triumphant assertion of any Conservative principle or shielded from imminent ruin any ancient institution. But he had been a successful leader. . . . His tactics were so various, so flexible, so shameless, the net by which his combinations were gathered in was so wide, he had so admirable a knack of enticing into the same lobby a happy family of proud old Tories and foaming Radicals, martial squires jealous for their country's honour

¹ Saintsbury's *Earl of Derby*.

² *Memoirs of an Ex-Minister*.

and manufacturers who had written it off their books as an unmarketable commodity, that, so long as his party backed him, no Government was strong enough to hold out against his attacks. . . . Opponents were wont to speak with envy of the laudable discipline of the Tory Party. They little knew the deep and bitter humiliation that was marked by the outward loyalty of its votes.

Hatred is often more flattering than affection, and the writer in his dislike exaggerated Disraeli's powers. The latter at this time was only "the supreme Hebrew juggler" in the germ. He had, it is true, done something wonderful in merely making and keeping his personal position. But his record as a statesman, or even as a party manager, had not so far remotely resembled the sinister wizardry Lord Robert imputed to him. He had never been able to prevail over Palmerston, though on occasion he may have secured some modifications in Palmerston's policy. If he had sometimes contrived to bring Radicals and Tories into the same lobby, he had formed no permanent combination. If he had weaned the Conservative Party from Protection, it was not until the cause of Protection had been definitely lost. To the party, on the other hand, he had surrendered his Wycombe programme, the Young England aspirations, and the Irish policy which he and Bentinck had devised. He had bent the knee to the remnants of the "Venetian oligarchy." The Cecil tirade was more a foreshadowing of things to come than a faithful record of what had been. The hour of Disraeli's supremacy had not yet struck, and the Reform Bill of 1859, though he did his best for its success, was not his measure, and when it appeared in the Commons there was no combination of Tories and Radicals (as Cecil suggested) to support it.

Bright ridiculed the "fancy franchises." Russell led the attack on the measure as a whole on the ground that it did not sufficiently extend the franchise, though in fact it went further than the Bill he was himself to introduce a few months later. With lukewarm friends and determined foes the fate of the Bill was sealed, and

on All Fools' Day, 1859, the Government was defeated by thirty-nine votes.

Parliament was thereupon dissolved. In the ensuing elections the Conservatives gained a number of seats, but in the end they could only muster 315 against 337 members of the Opposition. The country had shown little interest in reform, but much concern over foreign policy, and the fact that Russell, Palmerston, and Gladstone were all champions of the popular Italian cause was decisive in many constituencies. After the elections a fresh attempt was made to get Palmerston to join the Derby Government, with leadership of the Commons, but this time there was scarcely a prospect of success. Palmerston and Russell had forgiven one another, and on the Italian question both were in accord with Gladstone. A meeting of the Opposition was held in Willis's Rooms (formerly Almack's), where it was resolved that Lord Hartington should move a vote of no confidence. In the House of Commons Disraeli protested against the fate of governments being decided outside Parliament, and at a place more suitable for assemblies of dowagers and fashionable beauties than for a gathering of statesmen. Also, with apparent seriousness, he suggested that the Cabinet's foreign policy should not be condemned before the production of Foreign Office papers by which, he claimed, it could be fully justified. The Commons, however, only waited to divide until enough Liberal Members had taken the oath and a majority against the Government was secure. The Hartington motion was carried by thirteen. Why Disraeli did not produce the Foreign Office documents on which he laid so much stress is still a matter of speculation. According to Malmesbury, they would have saved the situation. Others think that they would have done more harm than good, and suggest that Disraeli was in the position of a litigant who relies on the speech of counsel because he dare not produce evidence; the

papers were to be talked about, but not to be seen. Probably, as Mr. Sichel holds, Disraeli was riding for a fall. The Italian enthusiasm which dominated the country was naturally reflected in the new House, and unless Ministers were ready to wear the Italian colours it was useless for them to think of remaining in office. Therefore the sooner they were dismissed on the straight issue the better.

Disraeli was probably not sorry to resign a thankless task, and Derby was solaced by being made an extra Knight of the Garter.

CHAPTER XII

THE next six years of Disraeli's life were destitute of dramatic interest. For the whole period Palmerston held office, and, whether with a small majority or with none, was firm in the saddle till his death. Towards him, as Dr. Brandes has written, Disraeli "assumed neither the contemptuous attitude that he took towards Peel, nor the satirical manner that he commonly used in opposing Aberdeen and Russell."

With few opportunities for flash or glitter, compelled to constant wariness, always under the handicap of working with men temperamentally unsympathetic, discouraged by grumbles and disadvantageous comparisons, he accepted all with a gallant philosophy, and grew gradually to be, in virtue largely of what he then endured, "the most consummately dexterous leader of the Opposition that the House of Commons has known." The description is that of a discerning political enemy, Mr. Herbert Paul, who doubtless had in his mind the contrast between Disraeli's patience in opposition and Gladstone's petulance in defeat. Rejected at the polls, Gladstone at once turned to other pursuits, leaving to Lord Hartington the thankless task of leadership. Disraeli, perhaps because he could do no other, expended on these discouraging years the most splendid gifts of a richly endowed nature :

He lived in the House of Commons, and he lived for it. His fund of patience seemed to be inexhaustible. He sat through the longest and dreariest debates without betraying by any outward symptom that he was bored. Alert and wakeful, especially when he seemed to be asleep, he was ready at any moment to take advantage of a situation, or an individual. . . . An Opposition so numerous, led by a Parliamentary champion of such skill and force, would have been

too strong for any Government in ordinary times. But the peculiarity of the situation was that three-fourths of the Conservative Party had more confidence in Palmerston than they had in Disraeli.

Respect for his judgment, however, grew slowly during these lean years, and he remained the wisest critic of the conduct of foreign affairs. Napoleon had a brief spell of popularity in England while he engaged in the Italian war, but the Peace of Villa Franca—the peace which, in Palmerston's gaily profane phrase, "passed all understanding"—brought him the reproach of having betrayed his allies. The English never gave, and never intended to give, anything but "moral support" to Italy; and they were thus in a position to express furious contempt because the Emperor did not march on Venice and the Adriatic. Supplying no bread themselves, they could despise the Emperor's half a loaf. It was, moreover, widely assumed that France could have but one motive to make peace with Austria, namely, to free her hands for hostile action against Great Britain. There was a great agitation to increase the Army and Navy, and to this period belongs Tennyson's:—

Storm, storm, Riflemen form;
Ready, be ready against the storm;
Riflemen, Riflemen, Riflemen form!

The "storm" left Disraeli unconcerned, and when panic was reflected in the Budget of 1859 by an addition of fourpence to the income tax he could find cool enjoyment in lecturing Gladstone on the ruinous results of a policy of provocation. Again, in 1862, he denounced "bloated armaments," and, laying down the principle that "expenditure depends on policy," attacked the Government on account of its bellicose extravagance. He had, indeed, thoughts at this time of trying to turn out Ministers. It was settled at a party meeting that Spencer Walpole should bring forward a motion urging the reduction of expenditure, but on Palmerston announcing that he would treat

it as a vote of confidence, Walpole's courage failed him. Excessively annoyed, Disraeli rose to suggest that the House had better go home to bed.

Disraeli's attitude during the American Civil War was distinguished by an intelligence unequalled in any other politician. He scrutinised both parties to the dispute with the detachment of an interested but disinterested foreigner. The majority of the Conservative Party, as well as the majority of the Liberals who had been Whigs or Peelites, sympathised with the Confederacy mainly on the ground that they confidently believed the Virginian planter to be something like an English gentleman. Cobden, Bright, and their like as naturally sided with the North, because they imagined in the representatives of that cause some affinity with the English Nonconformist tradesman. Disraeli, having no partialities, was mainly concerned to keep England strictly neutral; and his temper, perhaps even more than his active policy, was the most valuable national asset of the time. He spoke with "the greatest respect for those Southern States who, representing a vast population of men, were struggling for some of the greatest objects of existence—independence and power." He also expressed a strong doubt whether the negroes to be delivered from slavery would find themselves in practice as much "emancipated" as some people in England believed. But when the Emperor of the French proposed intervention on behalf of the Confederate Government, and Palmerston was only waiting for Conservative approval, Disraeli would take no step and give no word. "He did not say a word from that bench," admitted Bright, "likely to create a difficulty with the United States." Probably he was more indifferent than any man of affairs in England to the result of the struggle. The issue and the partisans seem equally to have bored him. His frank and undiplomatic opinion of America may be gathered from a passage in *Venetia*,

in which he compares the Mediterranean with the Atlantic :

Will the Atlantic ever be so memorable ? Its civilisation will be more rapid, but will it be so refined ? And, far more important, will it be as permanent ? Will it not lack the racy vigour and the subtle spirit of aboriginal genius ? Will not a colonial character cling to its society, feeble, inanimate, evanescent ? What America is deficient in is creative intellect. It has no nationality. Its intelligence has been imported, like its manufactured goods. Its inhabitants are a people, but are they a nation ? I wish that the empire of the Incas and the kingdom of Montezuma had not been sacrificed. I wish that the Republic of the Puritans had blended with the tribes of the wilderness.

Disraeli made rather a habit of using resounding proper names without possessing any definite idea of what they connoted. It is, therefore, not easy to determine whether he really imagined that the Incas and Montezuma were both neighbours and contemporaries of the Pilgrim Fathers. What is quite clear is that he felt small admiration for the America of his day, viewing it as the possessor of a purely derivative civilisation. Possibly he might have changed his opinions had he lived to see an American nation which, whatever else it may or may not be, has certainly shed the last trace of a "Colonial character," and is, rather unfortunately, giving something of its own "race and flavour" to the countries of the Old World. That he could ever have loved America is unlikely. The whole tenour of his mind was against that great experiment, æsthetically no less than politically.

It was no fixed hostility to intervention in foreign affairs which impelled him to keep his party out of the American quarrel. This is shown by the line he took when Prussia and Austria combined to attack Denmark in 1864. The British Government had encouraged the King of Denmark to insist on his hereditary right to the Duchies of Holstein and Slesvig. But when that

unhappy monarch found himself at war with the Germanic Powers no assistance was forthcoming. The warlike sentiment of the 'fifties had evaporated, though the passion for meddling remained. The notion among Liberals now was that England should influence events on the Continent by giving "moral support" to one side or another in a dispute. This compromise between the old Palmerstonian idea and the non-intervention creed of the Radicals had one advantage. It was decidedly cheap—at least for the time being. Even at the most extravagant valuation Ministerial speeches and leading articles cost vastly less than war on the most limited scale; and, backed by Garibaldi's red shirts, the King of Sardinia's bayonets, and Cavour's diplomacy, the system had actually worked in Italy, where a lasting tradition of English friendship took root.

It failed, however, with ignominy in the case of Denmark. The Danes naturally supposed that they would be backed by a people which had cheered them on to battle, and when they were coolly deserted in the hour of crisis not only they, but others, perceived that the bottom had fallen out of England's pretensions to lay down the law without paying the expense of the constable. Disraeli invited the House of Commons to express its opinion that the Government's policy had "lowered the just influence of this country in the councils of Europe, and thereby diminished the securities for peace." The vote of censure was not carried, and Palmerston's Government was saved by eighteen votes. But, as Dr. Brandes puts it, "it was the simple truth which was defeated by the majority."

The betrayal of Denmark—for in view of the declaration of Ministers, and especially of Palmerston, who had said in 1864 that it "would not be Denmark alone" with which Germany and Austria would have to contend in the event of violent attempts to overthrow Danish rights, there is no more appropriate word—was indeed a miserable end, perhaps inevitable, to the Palmerstonian policy. For years Palmerston had

snapped his fingers at one nation after another, and he now found, at last, that England stood alone. He had quite recently offended both France and Russia, but when the Danish trouble arose he looked to both to make common cause with England in curbing Prussia. France suggested impossible terms ; Russia refused on any terms whatsoever. England by herself was in no condition to take action, and Lord Stanley expressed the blunt truth when he said it would be "not impolicy but insanity" to engage in war for the sake of the Duchies. The ignominy, of course, did not reside in declining to fight, but in encouraging hopes which there was no power or intention to fulfil. Disraeli with bitter justice described the situation in a few words :

Within twelve months we have been twice repulsed at St. Petersburg. Twice have we supplicated in vain at Paris. We have menaced Austria, and Austria has allowed our menaces to pass by like the empty wind. We have threatened Prussia, and Prussia has defied us. Our objurgations have rattled over the head of the German Diet, and it has treated them with contempt.

Disraeli has been censured for his callous attitude to Italy, and when he wrote to a friend describing the Polish patriots as common brigands he may have been simply giving vent to the Jew's secular hatred of Poland. But had he been in charge of foreign affairs during this period it would almost certainly have been better for England and Europe. Palmerston and Russell between them had estranged Russia in 1863 by interference in the Polish question, and then, when they had encouraged Napoleon to take the matter up in earnest, had enraged France by a coy retreat. Disraeli, in words of true wisdom, indicated what his own policy would have been :

If England is resolved upon a particular policy war is not probable. If there is, under such circumstances, a cordial alliance between England and France, war is most difficult ; but if there is a thorough understanding between England France, and Russia, war is impossible.

Unquestionably the wretched figure cut by England in the Danish affair had an important and unfortunate influence on the subsequent course of European history. It gave Bismarck his cue. Henceforward Prussia could go forward to the full satisfaction of her ambitions without fear of English opposition, while the possession of the Duchies would finally enable her to forge a weapon which would keep the islanders in permanent check. "The English are afraid of the future German Navy," wrote Bismarck's secretary in 1864.¹ This was paying a far too extravagant compliment to British foresight. Disraeli was probably the only public man in England who had even begun to think about a German Navy. He had recognised, as early as 1848, that protection should be extended to Denmark, not merely for its own sake, but because its dismemberment would constitute a menace to British safety. Unfortunately, he was alone in his fears and his vision. The hand-to-mouth nature of thought in the Liberal Party has already been made clear. As to the Conservatives, Derby had managed, on the first sign of trouble concerning Denmark, to get a particularly bad attack of gout.

The General Election of 1865 was disappointing to Disraeli, for the Conservatives lost seats; but it showed that Palmerston no longer stood on his old pedestal, for the chief gains were to the Radicals who hated his policy. Palmerston survived the reverse only a few months, and was succeeded by Russell, now a Peer, with Gladstone as leader in the House of Commons. During the last years of Palmerston's life it had been understood that there was to be no forward movement. With his death the pent-up energies of the Liberal Party were released. The elections, so far as they had had any meaning, had been a mandate for tranquillity abroad and Reform at home, and very soon after Russell accepted office a measure for extending the franchise

¹ *Bismarck's Pen*, translated by Mrs. C. E. Barrett-Lennard.

was introduced. It was of an extremely cautious character, and, inasmuch as in the matter of the county franchise it fell short of the Conservative measure of 1859, the Radicals were naturally not enthusiastic. On the other hand, men like Robert Lowe and Lord Grosvenor regarded any extension of the franchise with repugnance. With these "Adullamites" many Conservatives, including Lord Cranborne,¹ were in complete sympathy. The situation contained elements which made the defeat of the Government a possibility, and the Conservative leaders would, no doubt, have been more than human had they resisted so obvious a temptation.

Against the supremacy of Palmerston they had been practically powerless. But Russell had no such hold on the country. The Government, moreover, was far from strong. Death had been busy with Palmerston's subordinates before it turned its attention to the veteran himself, and Russell's only lieutenant in the Commons of marked ability was Gladstone. The chance of killing the Government through the Reform Bill was thus considerable, and when it was found that the second reading was only carried by a majority of five, nothing remained but the provision of a decent pretext. Lord Dunkellin, one of the Adullamites, was kind enough to furnish it when he moved that "rating" should be substituted for "rental" as the basis of the borough franchise. It is impossible to believe either that the Conservatives and Adullamites discerned any wonderful value in the ratepayer, or that the orthodox Liberals were passionately enamoured of the rentpayer. The tenant not directly rated was known in those days as a "compound householder," and Disraeli was to show later that this "animal," as he called him, could, by a little juggling, be given a vote under a rating franchise. The Dunkellin amendment, in fact, raised a mere question of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, but it served to turn out a Government which, as a whole, cared very little for

¹ Formerly Lord Robert Cecil, afterwards the Marquess of Salisbury.

the policy imposed on it by Russell and Gladstone. The Liberals had found Reform a very awkward domestic problem, bringing dissension into their ranks, and, so far as could then be seen, the country was but mildly interested in it. When the Dunkellin amendment was carried by a majority of eleven, Russell resigned, despite the reluctance which the Queen, who always thought Derby rather too boisterous, and had not yet come under the spell of Disraeli, felt in parting with him.

Thus, for the third time, Derby and Disraeli took office without a majority. The new Government was purely Conservative, the Adullamites and two or three independent politicians, including the philanthropic Shaftesbury, having declined invitations to join it. It possessed several fresh members of distinction; Sir Stafford Northcote and Mr. Gathorne-Hardy, the former destined to lead the party; Lord Cranborne, soon to be Disraeli's fiercest opponent; and Lord Carnarvon, who, with some ability, had even more character and vision. The Government had hardly settled down when a most remarkable thing happened, of which no adequate explanation has been given. All of a sudden a frenzy for Reform declared itself. The very day after the Liberal Government resigned ten thousand people met in Trafalgar Square, and marched thence to Gladstone's house in Carlton House Terrace, "singing hymns and litanies" in honour of that statesman, who had become Liberal leader on Russell's retirement.¹ And a month later—the end of July, 1866—a crowd of less reverential temper tore down the railings of Hyde Park. Walpole, an inevitable member of any Derby Government, and now Home Secretary, burst into tears. Bright, seeing that his preaching had at last taken effect, preached the louder. Gladstone, hitherto "the Jesuit of the Cabinet," was suddenly transformed into the hero of democracy,

¹ G. W. E. Russell's *Life of Gladstone*.

and could even be pardoned a journey to Rome and an audience with the Pope. Reform was the only subject in which the public, lately so apathetic, would now take an interest. The war between Austria and Prussia was scarcely noticed, and even Italy's gain of Venetia, as an ironic sequel to her defeat at Lissa and Custozza, figured only as a minor item of the news. Prussia had achieved the headship of the Germanic body; a great step had been taken to Italian unity; but these matters were of small importance compared with the little more or less of enfranchisement.

Parliament met on February 5, 1867, and the Speech from the Throne, calling attention to the question of electoral reform, put forward a plea that the proposals which the Government would make should be considered in "a spirit of moderation and mutual forbearance." That a measure of Reform would be introduced had for some time been obvious. The clamour was too loud and insistent to be resisted, and even Lord Cranborne had written of "numberless irregularities and inconveniences in the present arrangement" that might well be corrected. But what sort of measure would it be? The Dunkellin amendment bound the Government to proceed on a rating, as distinct from a rental basis, but otherwise its hands were free. Gladstone, indeed, wrote that a Conservative Government must of necessity bring in a larger measure that would have been accepted from the Liberals,¹ but few Conservatives, at first, shared his view. Something must be done. But the majority was for doing the least possible.

In the Cabinet, as Lord John Manners told Lord Malmesbury, there were "distracted councils." Drummond's draft Bill, already mentioned, had no doubt accustomed many Conservatives to the thought of Reform on a large scale; but they were rather accustomed to the notion, as men are to baldness or toothache, than reconciled to it. Disraeli's subsequent boast that he had "educated" the party is essentially misleading, for education is a mental process, and the

¹ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*.

mind of Toryism remained unchanged. But it had acquired a respect for Disraeli's judgment. Ten years earlier Derby had written to a colleague: "As to Disraeli's unpopularity, I see it and I regret it, . . . but they could not do without him." "They," the rank-and-file, had at last reached the same conclusion. They had come to see dimly that on points of strategy Disraeli had been right, again and again, when they had been wrong. They realised that if they had listened to him they might have beaten Peel in time to save Protection. They realised that, in abandoning Protection when it had become a hopeless cause, he had taken the only intelligent course. For years they had been impatient with their leader because his caution contrasted so unpicturesquely with the gallant recklessness of Palmerston. They now saw in the Danish disgrace the Nemesis of the policy of which Disraeli had been the one constant and intelligent critic.

The two chiefs, also, were now united. After years of cross-purposes they had reached a *modus vivendi*. Derby as little as his party could "do without" Disraeli; and he had at last come to the conclusion that he could "do with" Disraeli better than with anyone else. At the time of the last attempt to gain Gladstone this truth had been borne in on him, and his chief feeling at the collapse of the plan must have been "What an escape!" In contrast with the appalling earnestness of Gladstone, there were attractions in the flexibility of his rival. Lord Clarendon put the matter neatly when he told Bishop Wilberforce that Derby "hated Disraeli, but believed in him as he would have done in an unprincipled trainer—he wins, that is all."

Disraeli has generally been pictured as the serpent of the Conservative Eden, but if so he was more subtle than Eve's tempter, and seduced while seeming to discourage. Only lately has evidence of any kind been available as to the genesis of the Tory Reform Bill, and even now much must be left to conjecture. But it is certain that almost immediately after he came into office, and at least five months before the Session

of 1867 opened, Derby was expressing himself in favour of Reform embodied in "a moderate and Conservative measure."¹ In this he had the support of the Queen, whose main wish was that there should be no commotion, and he seems to have hoped that the matter could be comfortably settled by the Tory Ministers passing some sort of Whiggish Act. Disraeli received the proposal coldly, and his attitude during the autumn of 1866 has led Mr. Buckle to suggest that he was at first no less antipathetic than Lord Cranborne to a Reform Bill, and even believed that the franchise could be safely left alone. This theory seems inconsistent with what was to follow. Much more probably Disraeli realised that no "moderate measure" would meet the situation, and saw, as Gladstone did, that the country would now insist on something altogether larger than the Liberal scheme which the Adullamites had wrecked. But, understanding also how he was distrusted by many in the party, he no doubt felt the wisdom of letting the initiative come from another. He therefore allowed the idea of Reform to simmer in Derby's mind, well knowing that it would presently come to a boil with the heat of outside agitation.

If he so argued, his judgment was excellent. Just before Christmas 1866, Derby wrote to him that "household suffrage" was a good hare to start.¹ Disraeli still permitted himself no transports, but a month later, receiving the assurance that his chief would be with him, he tentatively broached the project to the Cabinet.¹ It is clear from these facts that if Disraeli wanted to dish the Whigs, and tempted Derby to do so, he gained his object by indirect means. Not until Derby had committed himself would Disraeli, knowing his man, have anything to say. But, once Derby was committed, he saw to it that the policy should be pressed vigorously to the end.

In fact Derby wanted no tempting. Professing to be without political ambitions, he had spent almost

¹ Buckle, vol. iv.

as much time in politics as in racing, gout, and Homeric translation. But his politics had not been fortunate. He had left the Whigs, he had left Peel; and Whigs and Peelites had ever since been in power—never more so than when he held office on sufferance. He was now old, and the chance of winning one big race before he retired was appealing.

Desire to "dish the Whigs" fully explains Derby's share in the transaction. Disraeli's case was more complex. An immediate victory did not mean so much to him as to the older man. From the personal and the public point of view alike he had to think of the future. A year before he had said of a £7 franchise that it would fill Parliament with "a horde of selfish and obscure mediocrities incapable of anything but mischief, and that mischief devised and regulated by the raging demagogues of the hour." Things of this sort come naturally to an Opposition leader, and whether the language is temperate or turgid depends merely on temperament. But probably Disraeli spoke with a kind of esoteric sincerity. Though he had genuine sympathy with the working classes, he was in no sense a democrat. "Man," he said, in *Coningsby*, "has two duties, to adore and to obey." He believed that a wide franchise must involve a decline in the authority of Parliament. Did he regard such a decline as wholly evil? The "raging demagogue" might have his hour, but not more than his hour, and after that would come the turn of the bureaucrat. Englishmen were attached—at least the kind of Englishmen who then took an interest in affairs—to Parliamentary government; it was part of their life. The alien in Disraeli had no such prejudice, and he may even have regarded with complaisance the prospect of the gradual supersession of Parliament by some system more in accordance with his Oriental notions of government.

There remains to be considered a very curious point. Even the most hardened of cynics saw something more than the ordinary indifference to political decency in the Conservative leaders opposing in one year a

moderate measure of Liberal Reform, and in the very next year passing a much wider measure of their own. Disraeli would hardly be conscious of the case against him on this count. It was not only that he possessed all Contarini Fleming's contempt for the "rules of mock combat"; he had also his own positive code. Blunt Englishmen saw a similarity between his change of front in 1867 and Peel's change of front in 1846; and to urge a distinction between the two cases might invite a charge of casuistry. It should, however, be remembered that Disraeli came of a race which had for centuries served the letter of the law. From remote generations his ancestors had managed to exist through the Sabbath while keeping, or at least not outraging, those rules for its observance which are set out, though not exhaustively, in "one hundred and fifty-six double pages of folio in the Baylonian Talmud." Gladstone, Cranborne, and Lowe were all agreed in denouncing his conduct in 1867 as unworthy of an English statesman. They omitted the small fact that, though he was a statesman of England, he was not an English statesman. That he was a man of honour after his own fashion is proved by many episodes, as well as by the general tenour of his political life. But it was his fashion, not Gladstone's or Cranborne's; and his own inward monitor, we may be almost sure, saw nothing inconsistent in his conduct in 1867 with the profession he had made in 1846.

When Parliament met there were three factions in the Cabinet. Of all its members Stanley was probably the only convinced Reformer, but both his father and Disraeli, for reasons of their own, supported him. On the opposite side were Cranborne and two or three others whose sole object in touching Reform at all was to keep it within the narrowest possible limits. Between these two bodies were the majority of the Ministers, sympathising with Cranborne's fears, but alarmed by public feeling, still more troubled over the

idea of a split in the party, and quite unable to resist the pressure of the two leaders together. It was not surprising, in the circumstances, that the first decision was to throw responsibility on Parliament, and proceed by resolution instead of by Bill. Disraeli, with audacity, appealed for a settlement by consent. "If," says Lord Morley, "Mr. Disraeli had only at this time enjoyed the advantage of a better character," the good sense of the proposal might have been recognised. Reform had baffled Whig, Tory, and Coalition Governments, and Reform by consent was a statesman-like conception, even if it sprang from "distracted councils" and were urged by a distrusted politician.

However, feeling did not permit, and the resolutions, riddled by Gladstone, Bright, and Lowe, were withdrawn. A Bill was introduced, or rather two Bills, one after the other. On Saturday, February 23, the Cabinet had agreed to what was called the "larger scheme," which was, in fact, household suffrage for the boroughs on a rating basis, accompanied by various compensations designed to lessen the qualms of the more cautious Conservatives. Lord Cranborne, however, took advantage of the Sabbath calm to work out with pencil and paper the statistical aspects of these arrangements. Deciding that their effect would be altogether too democratic, he communicated his misgivings to Carnarvon and General Peel, and on the Monday all three resigned. The situation was appalling. The Cabinet could not be assembled till half-past one. Derby had to address a party meeting at half-past two, and Disraeli had to explain to the House of Commons a Bill—some kind of Bill—at half-past four. Stanley allayed the panic by producing the "smaller scheme," of which the main feature was a £6 rating franchise, the three refractory Ministers thereupon agreed to remain at their posts, and the comparatively unambitious measure was duly explained to the House of Commons.

The £6 rating franchise satisfied nobody. The Radicals condemned it as inadequate, though it went

farther than the proposals of the late Russell Government. To the Conservatives it was substantially as objectionable as "household suffrage," without possessing the supposed electioneering magic of that phrase. But it can easily be understood why Disraeli agreed to it. On that Black Monday the one thing necessary was to gain time. The temper of the party had to be ascertained. If Cranborne, Peel, and Carnarvon spoke only for themselves, they could be disregarded, but they must be humoured if they were found to have behind them a strong following. If the average Conservative had some difficulty in reading Disraeli's mind, Disraeli had some difficulty in reading the mind of the average Conservative. But a few days later a meeting of Members of Parliament at the Carlton Club afforded an indication of the way the wind was blowing. A general disposition was evinced towards household suffrage, and the two leaders hesitated no longer. The "smaller measure" was dropped, and the objectors with it. On Monday, March 4, their resignations were announced. Derby and Disraeli had decided that they might safely go forward with the "larger scheme."

A fortnight later Disraeli introduced it in the House of Commons. It provided that every borough householder, being also a ratepayer, was to have one vote, and those who paid £1 a year in direct taxation were to have two. There were "fancy franchises" for fundholders, savings-bank depositors, and members of the learned professions, and for the counties the rating qualification was to be £15 in place of the £50 rental. To Cranborne this Bill suggested "political suicide." To Gladstone it was merely a piece of political window-dressing. Cranborne held that everything that distinguished the Bill from household suffrage was either illusory or would be jettisoned before the measure reached the Statute Book. Gladstone complained that unless something was done for the large but dubious numbers of "compound householders" the Bill would be "in the first place a lottery and in the

second an imposture." Disraeli was happy in the divided judgments of his adversaries. If the one were right, part of the House would accept the Bill as boldly democratic; if the other were right the measure could be represented as marked by the caution proper in a Conservative Minister.

Yet another week, and the Bill came up for a second reading. Gladstone, it is clear from the *Memorials* of Lord Selborne, at one time contemplated moving its rejection, and Gladstone's own confession, published in Lord Morley's *Life*, shows that at first he did not appreciate the strength of the Government's position. Disraeli was certainly not unwilling that he should continue in such a misapprehension, and the "great chagrin and mortification" which he expressed over the Cabinet's late troubles was probably a bit of clever play-acting. If Gladstone could be induced to assume that, because the Government had been left without a scrap of dignity, it and its Bill could be destroyed with impunity, so much the better when the moment came for appeal to the country. Before the second reading, however, Gladstone had been recalled to wiser counsels by the attitude of his own followers. The Bill had caused some dissension in the Conservative ranks; but there was still more dissatisfaction among the Liberals over the rumoured decision to reject it. Gladstone could not conceal his wrath. "One might feel almost thankful," jeered Disraeli, "that gentlemen in this House who sit on the opposite sides of this table are divided by a good broad piece of furniture."

His game was played by the intense acerbity of the Liberals. Conservatives who heard or read the censures of Gladstone and Bright were greatly comforted; and the distrusted Bill began to be regarded as a clever party move and almost as a new buttress to the Constitution. The next Liberal move, after the second reading had been carried without a division, further strengthened Disraeli's position. Bright, a democrat by profession, was then, as always, full of

middle-class prejudices. He now discovered that there was a class in the boroughs which, in its own interest, and in the interests of all "intelligent working men" (that is, working men who admired Mr. Bright), should be left voteless, since its poverty and lack of character would make it amenable to threats and bribes. This class he called "the residuum," and in practice the residuum consisted of all householders rated below £5. These he proposed to exclude. The immediate result was the formation of a new Liberal "cave" called the "Tea Room Party," led by Professor Fawcett, the blind politician in reference to whose aridity Disraeli once exclaimed, "If that man only had eyes, how we should damn them!" Bright's instruction had to be hastily withdrawn, and it was long indeed before he heard the last of "residuum." Moreover, the Tea Room enthusiasts, now thoroughly distrustful of their official chiefs, voted against Gladstone himself, giving the Government a comfortable majority in its first real trial of strength.

"A smash perhaps without example," wrote Gladstone ruefully in his diary.¹ It was indeed. Halfway through April the Liberals were in almost complete disorganisation, while the Government's health improved daily. The number of Conservative secessions had not been large, and as the prospects improved discipline became easier to maintain. When one Tory Member of Dutch descent likened Disraeli to an "Asian mystery," the mocking retort showed full confidence and excellent spirits:

I can assure the hon. gentleman that I listened with great pleasure to the invectives he delivered against me. I admire his style; but it requires practice. When he talks about an Asian mystery I will tell him that there are Batavian graces about his exhibitions which take the sting out of what he has said.

Indeed, Disraeli, in the moment of triumph, seems to have over-estimated the security of his position.

¹ Morley's *Life*.

According to Bishop Wilberforce, he boasted his power to hold Gladstone down for twenty years. "The right honourable gentleman has had his innings," said Disraeli, and Gladstone's subsequent acknowledgment that he had been "bowled over" suggests that the taunt struck home. But though Gladstone was actually considering the advisability of resigning the Liberal leadership, it has often been said that, while Disraeli was supreme when the House dispersed for the Easter recess, the tables were turned when the House re-assembled, and thereafter Gladstone recovered his mastery. The bare facts would seem to support a contention which, as we shall see later, is unjustified. One by one the checks which distinguished the Bill from household suffrage were removed. The qualifying period was reduced from two years to one. The educational franchise was abandoned, the dual vote for taxpayers followed, all the fancy franchises disappeared. The use of voting-papers, designed as a safeguard against mob law, was abandoned. Lodgers were enfranchised. Almost the only Liberal amendment of any consequence to be rejected was Mill's proposal to give votes to women. But the most surprising surrender of the Government was its acceptance of an amendment which, by abolishing the "compounding" distinction, enfranchised every male householder in a Parliamentary borough. This meant political power to a mass more residual than Bright's residuum; and many Liberals were horrified when Disraeli calmly stated that the Government would accept the amendment. In vain Lowe appealed to the gentlemen of England, "with their ancestry behind them and their posterity before them"—which, after all, is the case with quite common people—to save the Constitution from "a multitude struggling with want and discontent." The Conservative Party was now quite debauched, and no draught of democracy that its tapster might decide on was too heady or voluminous. At every Cabinet meeting, says Lord Malmesbury, the Bill became more Radical. When it reached the House

of Lords the Duke of Buccleuch observed that the only word left of the original was "Whereas." But, though the Conservative Peers showed some signs of mutiny, Derby's threat of resignation brought them to heel. He had had gout very badly during the transformation of the Bill, and it was realised by the Peers, with a shudder, that he was the chief and perhaps the only obstacle to the unchecked leadership of Disraeli.

Disraeli's conduct of the Bill was not only distinguished by the "diabolical cleverness" which "quite awed" Gladstone. It was extremely high-handed. The most vital amendment was accepted by him on his own responsibility, and not until after the deed was done was a Cabinet summoned to hear from a trained statistician what would be its numerical effect on the register. "I do not suppose," wrote Gladstone,¹ "that in the whole history of the 'mystery man' this proceeding can be surpassed." His language was as audacious as his action. He spoke 310 times on the Bill. From this spate of oratory the only quite definite idea that can be obtained is that of the man's extraordinary agility. At one time, with cynical effrontery, he would play with some notion, as the superiority of the ratepayer over all the rest of humanity, until it appeared a cardinal article of the Conservative creed. At another, he would delve into history to prove that the Tories had always been the popular party in the State. He had done the same thing in his novels, but with a difference. In the novels his history, if not impeccable, is at least more truthful than that of the Whig historians. In his House of Commons speeches he dealt largely in audacious myth. On the whole, his flouts were more convincing than his arguments. Lowe was not an easy man for a Tory leader to answer in serious vein. But Disraeli could destroy the whole effect of a speech, replete with the best Oxonian scholarship, by simply waving it aside as the production of "some inspired schoolboy."

¹ Morley's *Life*.

With the Liberal and Radical reformers he dealt faithfully. Their plan, he said, was "the enfranchisement of a certain favoured portion of the working classes," that portion which in public was "fed by soft dedication all day long." These favourites, he declared, truly enough, were meant to form "a Prætorian Guard" to prevent the rest of their class from obtaining the privilege of the vote. If he failed to be convincing in his attempts to prove the country squires the hereditary champions of the people, he certainly succeeded in tearing to pieces any pretensions of the middle-class manufacturers to pose as the protectors of the masses. And if he spoke always with cleverness there were times when he uttered words of deep wisdom. To Lord Cranborne, complaining that the Bill would encourage confederacies, agitators, and political manipulators, he replied :

It is all very true. Demagogues and agitators are very unpleasant, and leagues and registers may be very inconvenient, but they are incidents to a free and constitutional country, and you must put up with these inconveniences or do without many important advantages.

Lord Cranborne had, in fact, not been attacking the Bill, but representative Government, free speech, and a free Press. To him, perhaps, these things did not seem "advantages," and a case for such a view may be made out, just as a case can be made out for the climate of Singapore against that of England. Singapore has no east wind, and is ill adapted for golf. These, for many people, are distinct advantages, but something must be given up in return, and it is unreasonable to complain that one never gets in Singapore a chance of cubbing, and rarely feels an appetite for Yorkshire pudding. Disraeli's realism made him impatient of people who desired incompatibles. He probably thought very little of the British Constitution, but he thought still less of those who, in eulogising it, declared that it would be perfection if its only vital element were aristocracy.

At the end of Disraeli's third-reading speech occurred words which have been frequently quoted :

For my part I do not believe that the country is in danger. I think England is safe in the race of men who inhabit her ; that she is safe in something more precious than her accumulated capital—her accumulated experience ; she is safe in her national character, in her fame, in the traditions of a thousand years, and in that glorious future which I believe awaits her.

This confidence was shared by scarcely any of the leading men of the time. It was a moment of scare very similar to that which succeeded the Great War ; and there was little real difference between Reformers like Bright and anti-Reformers like Cranborne. Cranborne honestly believed that any considerable extension of the franchise would ruin the country, and certainly that it would ruin what he regarded as the chief guarantee of the country, the aristocracy. From the beginning of his life to the end he was perfectly consistent ; his whole career was one long and hopeless rear-guard action against "progress." Bright was as little desirous of giving power to the people, but he thought his own class would be safer if it could train up in subservience the "respectable" working-class man, who would be a drag on the "residuum." The only difference was one of subtlety and interest. Cranborne, who believed in aristocracy as a principle, though no man ever less delighted in the incidental state of an aristocrat, wanted to maintain as long as possible the influence of his order, and could hardly bring himself to a minimum extension of the franchise. Bright, who desired the permanent supremacy of actual and potential money-makers, wanted enough of democracy to curb the landed classes and not enough to endanger the sway of the industrial employer. Both were equally animated by "class motives," but whereas Bright had no motive but that of perpetuating what Disraeli had called the "thralldom of capital," Cranborne did think, according to his lights, of the country as a whole.

Naturally enough, in view of the condition of the urban working-class, Cranborne's apprehensions were widely shared. It was not merely that a large part of the population was still illiterate; England had governed itself tolerably well when even its rulers could hardly sign their names. The real trouble was that the industrial anarchy had reduced the masses, now to be entrusted with political power, to a condition of unpicturesque savagery of which only a pale reflection now remains in certain districts of Scotland, the North, and the Midlands. The selfish dominance of capitalists of the Bright type had created a corresponding disregard of amenity in the workers, and the trade unions, frowned on by the law, naturally took on a lawless character. Small wonder, then, that to Derby, though he might chuckle over "dishing the Whigs," the business, when he gave it a moment's real thought, seemed "a leap in the dark." The Act added a million voters to the electorate, most of them, as Mr. Herbert Paul says, uneducated, and some of them the poorest of the poor. To Cranborne, the whole thing appeared "a political betrayal" without parallel. By Lowe the measure was judged an object for the "shame, the rage, the scorn, the indignation, and the despair" of every Englishman who was neither knave nor fool. By Gladstone the year of its passing was pronounced to be deplorable for the character of the House of Commons, "yet one of promise for the country, though of promise not unmixed with evils." To Carlyle it was simply "shooting Niagara":

Soft, you my honourable friends; I will weigh out the corpse of your mother—mother of mine she never was, but only step-mother and milch cow—and you shan't have the pottage—not yours, you observe, but mine.

Carlyle absurdly exaggerated the attitude of Disraeli to his adopted country. It was always detached, and at one time it was bitter. But that Disraeli generally wished England well, that he served England well, so far as he was allowed to do so, and so far as his special

idiosyncrasies permitted, is beyond doubt. It seems certainly true, however, that he took the "leap in the dark" in a spirit quite different from that of any public man of native blood. What was his real view of the measure? He rejoiced in it, of course, as a personal triumph:

Lord John Russell had dealt with the question and had failed. Lord Aberdeen had dealt with the question and had failed. Lord Palmerston had dealt with the question and had failed. Lord Derby had dealt with the question and had failed; and afterwards Lord John Russell had dealt with the question again and had failed¹—

whereas he, Disraeli, had succeeded. The vaunt was justified. Granted Disraeli's point of view, his conduct of the Bill was a piece of Parliamentary dexterity for which one knows not where to seek the fellow. Starting with a mutiny in the Cabinet, watched at first with gloomy suspicion by the mass of his followers, he had contrived to make them accept with applause, and even with the smirk of people who think they are doing something clever, amendments which had been proposed by the Opposition with wrecking intent and the extravagance of which had been purposely exaggerated with that object. The *tertius gaudens* can rarely have done better. It was like the famous cat-and-rat farm, where the cats ate the rats, and the rats ate the cats, and the skins of both fell to the adroit speculator who presided over the series of mutual exterminations. Disraeli put Gladstone and Bright wrong with their own party while making them subserve his purpose. If we say that these dignified people were manipulated like marionettes, we state the cleverness of the business in terms far too grudging. For a marionette is moved by direct action, and here there was nothing so coarse as wire-pulling. Disraeli simply made use of the Liberals—all the Liberals, from Lowe to Bright—as one makes use of a natural force. He put certain things in position, and the rest

¹ Speech at Edinburgh, October, 1867.

was done, involuntarily and often reluctantly, by the victims themselves. Features which he wanted, but which he dared not propose himself, were obligingly put forward in the shape of Liberal amendments far exceeding anything which Gladstone, with his care for the House of Commons, or Bright, with his care for his own class, would have tolerated had they been in power. They were put in the belief that Disraeli, if he refused them, would be condemned by the country, and if he accepted them, would be embroiled with his own followers. But his own followers were hypnotised into the belief that they were winning some kind of victory, and it was the Liberals who made the more sorry showing in the country.

But after all the lust for a personal vindication hardly explains Disraeli's acceptance of a measure of reform which seemed to so many people of the time dangerously generous. He could have enjoyed a triumph quite as luxurious at far less expense. Why, then, did he show, not only recklessness, but almost glee, in throwing away his paper safeguards and accepting all that the Radicals pressed for?

The truth seems capable of condensation into two short propositions: (1) With his curious and alien theories he saw no reason to dread the results of a wide franchise extension. (2) A wide franchise extension enlarged his own importance, since he could more easily establish an ascendancy over the newly emancipated masses, with their shifting and unstable temper, than over those classes in which political opinion was organised, hereditary, and almost instinctive.

It is "pretty certain," wrote Mr. Belloc, that Disraeli knew that "the gift he was conferring on the working classes was one that they would not be allowed to use."¹ This shrewd saying has support in Disraeli's novels, ever the best index to his mind. In *Sybil* he said: "The people are not strong; the people never can be strong. Their attempts at self-vindication will end only in their suffering and confusion." Disraeli had

¹ *History of England*, Lingard and Belloc, vol. xi.

far too realistic a mind to be misled into believing, as so many eminent Victorians did, that the wide distribution of the vote means a correspondingly wide distribution of political power. With men like Bright there seemed to be an idea that franchise extension was like a practice sum—so many articles at so much per article make so much. To Disraeli the matter was much more like one of those astonishing exercises in algebra, in which, after multiplying and multiplying, one reaches the result: 20,000,000 multiplied by zero equals zero. The spectres which haunted Lowe and Cranborne did not trouble him, because while he had none of the nineteenth century's faith in the vote he also had little fear of it. He saw it was something—though perhaps less than might appear—when possessed by a very small minority, but that it could be nothing (beyond a tiny fraction of a voice in the choice between two sets of masters once in five or six years) when it was the possession of many millions. Carlyle was rating the vote far too highly when he talked of it as establishing the right to a ten-thousandth share in a "master of tongue-fence." If it did that it would have some sort of efficacy. In fact, the "master of tongue-fence"—and he is seldom a master—never dreams of regarding himself as the representative of anybody. He is in Parliament for his own purposes, and since the degradation of the franchise they have been, as a general rule, purposes increasingly separate from any idea of the public good. Disraeli, in *Coningsby*, made Sidonia say that, while there is "no error so vulgar as to believe that revolutions are occasioned by economical causes," he is "still less of opinion" that the troubles of the age "can be removed by any new disposition of political power." Disraeli wrote sincerely here. He had spoken sincerely when, as leader of the Opposition, he had declared that degradation of the franchise would spell the ruin of Parliament. But the ruin of Parliament would give him no deep pain. For Parliament he had merely the devotion of a man to his business, a devotion scarcely touched

with affection, not at all informed with reverence. Like Mr. Balfour after him, he enjoyed the Parliamentary game, because he could play it so supremely well, without being at all impressed, after the manner of most Englishmen, by Parliament as a device of government.

"Thanks to Parliamentary government," he wrote in *Sybil*, "the people of England were saved from ship-money, which money the wealthy paid, and only got in its stead the customs and the excise, which the poor mainly supply." Parliamentary government appeared to him to have been always selfish, and he did not regard its character in this respect as having been changed by the Act of 1832, which ended the reign of pure, or nearly pure, aristocracy. The admission of the rich middle class had only spread the selfishness over a little wider surface. "The middle classes," he once said, "emancipated the negroes, but they never proposed a Ten Hours Bill." Thus if the Act of 1867 did in truth strike a blow at the power of Parliament, Disraeli was not the man to think himself a criminal for delivering it, or permitting it to be delivered. To quote Sidonia once more, "an educated nation recoils from the imperfect vicariate of what is called a representative government" and "the tendency of advanced civilisation is in truth to pure monarchy." Keeping in view these dicta, it is not difficult to divine Disraeli's inner mind and to understand how, like a Japanese *jiu-jitsu* wrestler, he made the misguided strength of his opponents subserve his own secret purposes. He seems to have reached, many decades earlier, the view taken by the neo-absolutists of to-day. "The advantage of 'divine right,' or irremovable legitimacy," says Mr. Chesterton in his *Short History of England*, "is this: that here is a limit to the ambitions of the rich. *Roi ne puis*; the royal power, whether or not it was the power of heaven, was in one respect like the power of heaven. It was not for sale. Constitutional moralists have often implied that a tyrant and a rabble have the same vices. It has perhaps been

less noticed that a tyrant and a rabble most emphatically have the same virtues. And one virtue which they very markedly share is that neither tyrants nor rabbles are snobs ; they do not care a button what they do to wealthy people. It is true that tyranny was sometimes treated as coming from the heavens almost in the lesser and more literal sense of coming from the sky ; a man was no more expected to be the king than to be the west wind or the morning star. But, at least, no wicked miller can chain the wind to turn only his own mill ; no pedantic scholar can trim the morning star to be his own reading-lamp." Things like this are scattered all through the more important works of Disraeli. He desired, it is evident, a government which should be impartial between the various sections of the population, and, like Bolingbroke before him, he saw the chance of such a government in increased power for the Crown. He seems to have felt that political freedom is reserved for peoples economically independent, who, while strong enough to defend themselves against absorption, are unencumbered with world-wide interests. After 1846 that destiny was impossible for England ; to be anything she must be an Empire, and an Empire required concentrated sovereignty, which meant bureaucracy, while in the long run bureaucracy, if it were to be kept sweet, meant monarchy.

Disraeli, of course, might also have a personal point of view. The aristocracy and the middle class had refused him their confidence, the one because he he was not enough of a gentleman by birth, the other because he was too much of a gentleman by habit and nature. He must have known that he had qualities fitting him to fascinate monarchs and to dazzle the people ; but whether he considered his own aggrandisement, and if so whether incidentally or chiefly, is a point affecting judgment of his character rather than of his policy.

It may be said that it is chiefly because his aims and thoughts were so different from those of any

Englishmen of his time that so much obscurity attaches to them, that so much unmerited censure has been bestowed by his adversaries, and so much unmeaning eulogy has been poured forth by his admirers. He was misunderstood equally by friend and enemy. That was the inevitable consequence of his position. As a Conservative leader elsewhere, he could have followed the logic of his opinions, and delivered a frontal attack on Parliamentary institutions. Here ridicule and failure would have been his portion had he followed such a course. He could proceed only by indirect means, sapping and mining, weakening where he seemed to strengthen, strengthening where he seemed to weaken, never more essentially Conservative than when he seemed most Radical.

Disraeli could not help being a great man, and he certainly did not fall below the limited praise of Froude that he was "not less honest than other politicians because his professions were few." But he would have been, probably, a far greater man, and left a far less twisted skein for the student to unravel, had Benjamin Disraeli the elder chosen to take up his abode in some country where the intellectual atmosphere is clearer than in these brumous isles.

CHAPTER XIII

THE third Derby-Disraeli Government depends for its reputation on a single Act. Apart from Reform, its activities were purely departmental.

The historian of the Empire may, perhaps, find in the British North America Act, which federated the chief Canadian provinces, an importance he denies to any domestic event. But it hardly concerns the present writer. The statesman so often distinguished as the pioneer of Imperialism showed no interest in this measure. Disraeli, in fact, had little of that enthusiasm for the colonies which has marked his successors. Once he went so far as to write to Malmesbury that the Colonial Empire was a "millstone." So far as can be ascertained, his settled conviction was that most of the British oversea dominions were to be regarded by a statesman as examples of wasted opportunity. Thus he said as late as 1872 :

Self-government, in my opinion, when it was conceded, ought to have been conceded as a part of a great policy of Imperial consolidation, and to have been accompanied by an Imperial tariff, by securities for the people of England for the enjoyment of unappropriated lands which belonged to the Sovereign as their trustee, and by a military code which would have precisely defined the means and responsibilities by which the colonies should be defended, and by which, if necessary, this country should call for aid from the colonies.

The British North America Act contained no such provision. Lord Carnarvon, the Minister in charge, expressed a belief that Canada would adopt Free Trade, and in that faith Canada was left free to erect the tariff wall she in fact quickly set up against the mother country. There, as elsewhere, the colonists were given

full liberty to close their ports to immigrants, while the whole question of mutual aid in war was left open. Unlike the Manchester Radicals, Disraeli did discern a potential value in colonies, but he did not consider that it had been realised, or was likely to be realised, under such arrangements. His ideal seems to have been a connection giving equal advantages to both parties, but if such equality were impossible he considered that the Colonial Empire should rather exist for the English people than the English people for the Colonial Empire. He saw as anomalous, and likely to lead to serious complications with foreign powers, the arrangement which gave the colonies real independence with a nominally subject status. But here again he made a practical confession of impotence before the spirit of the age, which in every department interpreted liberty in terms of divorce.

In Europe the Government had no great difficulties. Sated for the moment by her victory over Austria, Prussia was resting for her next spring, and Stanley was able to earn a little easy credit for English diplomacy by helping to settle the Luxemburg question, then at issue between Paris and Berlin. In another quarter of the world British arms won prestige on inexpensive terms. For the Abyssinian trouble, ending in Napier's capture of Magdala without loss of life, the Liberal Government had been responsible. In 1862 the Negus Theodore addressed a letter to the Queen, but Russell seems to have been unaware of the dignity of her correspondent, who claimed to be the descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The letter was accordingly left unanswered by the Foreign Office. Theodore's resentment was exasperated by a tactless consul, and a few British subjects who happened to be within the remote potentate's reach suffered in chains for Russell's neglect. That Disraeli's grasp of Abyssinian niceties was firmer than his predecessor's is highly dubious. Moving a vote of thanks to the victorious

British forces after Napier had destroyed Magdala and Theodore had destroyed himself, he rejoiced that "the standard of St. George" had been "hoisted upon the mountains of Rasselas." He seems to have been under the impression that the hero of Johnson's rather dismal essay was a flesh-and-blood personage.

Meanwhile Lord Derby had retired. Yielding definitely to his old enemy the gout he resigned the Premiership in February, 1868. There were only two possible successors—one his own son Stanley, the other Disraeli. To many in the party the choice seemed to be one between evils. If Disraeli were distrusted as certainly an adventurer and as perhaps a concealed Radical, Stanley was deemed too like an ordinary Liberal to be a satisfactory leader. Blood, however, was still a prime consideration, and if at any time during the next four or five years Stanley had chosen to mount the Tory high horse half the party would have galloped with him. Stanley, however, had no inclination that way. Steadily loyal to Disraeli on every personal issue, true to his own convictions in public matters, he possessed neither talent for intrigue nor desire for his own aggrandisement. For Disraeli his affection and admiration were boundless, and the affection Disraeli reciprocated, though it is possible to detect some slight tincture of disdain. Stanley's refusal of the Greek crown must have earned the astonished contempt of a man of Disraeli's temperament. To prefer "Knowsley to the Parthenon and Lancashire to the Attic plains" was to shock an imagination which has been described as "too fervent to be tied by the multiplication table."

Even before Derby had tendered his resignation the Queen's choice had fallen on Disraeli. Her old aversion had yielded to his cleverness. She had been touched by his "understanding" condolences on the death of the Prince Consort, by his support of the Albert Memorial scheme, and, it may be added, by the gross

flattery in which Disraeli had not hesitated to enlarge on the virtues of the Prince, in whom he professed to find "an union of the manly graces and sublime simplicity of chivalry with the intellectual splendour of the Attic Academe"—a "rare combination of romantic energy and classic repose." Disraeli's past was now forgiven, and even forgotten, for the Queen, woman-like, would see no ill in a favourite any more than she would distinguish redeeming features in any man or woman so unfortunate as to have earned her dislike. She saw both people and questions in terms of black and white; her temperament knew no half-tones, and against the whiteness of her new Prime Minister the figure of Gladstone, which had never favourably impressed her, was regarded with a more sombre disapproval.

The Conservative Party as a whole was acquiescent without enthusiasm; Cranborne remained hostile, but, despite his high character and brilliance as a writer and speaker, he could command only a small following. Like his sons, he seems to have lacked any spontaneous gift for working in harmony with other men. Only after submitting himself to Disraeli's rule—and then but in a limited degree—did he acquire the art of co-operation. Whatever danger there was of continued schism, however, was removed by the policy of the Opposition. The Conservative ranks began to close from the moment that the Liberal leader opened his attack on the Irish Church.

In "dishing the Whigs" the Derby Government had robbed Liberalism of an effective battle-cry. To the philosophic mind the injury might seem slight; an earnest reformer, it might be inferred, should rejoice to see his aims accomplished, even though by another agency. But it is part of the character of Liberalism, which represents the restless element in human nature, to value a project more than an acquisition; and by a simple extension we arrive at the state of mind in which one is actually displeased when a project, long and

passionately urged, unexpectedly reaches realisation. Where the realisation is effected by a rival party, other feelings come into play, and everything combines to stimulate a search for a new appeal to the desire for change. It was so in 1868. The possibilities of Reform being now exhausted, the Liberal leaders thought it necessary to find some other means of vindicating their claim to be in the van of progress, and Gladstone, casting his gaze across St. George's Channel, promptly persuaded himself that the cause of all Irish troubles was the Protestant ascendancy. One symbol of that ascendancy was the Established Church in Ireland, and Gladstone now declared that the axe must be put to the upas tree beneath the shadow of which there could be no healthy life. In embarking on this crusade, the Liberal leader incidentally did Disraeli an excellent turn. The Church in Ireland was, indeed, difficult to defend, and Disraeli had himself pronounced it indefensible. But to create an Irish question was to put English questions in the shade, and nothing suited him better than the raising of an issue which promised to repair such lesions as still remained in the Conservative Party. Moreover, as Prime Minister he was finding the Church of England, and especially the problem of ecclesiastical patronage, exceedingly troublesome. Transfer of "the holy strife of disputatious men" to the neighbouring island promised considerable relief.

Before he had been many months in supreme control, two bishoprics and several deaneries fell vacant, and in the autumn of 1868 died Dr. Longley, Archbishop of Canterbury. This was all very awkward for Disraeli. He knew little about the dignified clergy. At Hughenden he observed the good squire's habit of regular attendance at the parish church—Sir Roger de Coverley himself could not have done the thing better—but a visit to Westminster Abbey to hear a noted preacher provoked his ingenuous wonder. "I would not," he told Dean Stanley, "have missed the sight for anything."¹ When appointments were to be made he

¹ *Dean Stanley's Life*, vol. ii.

generally had recourse to Crockford, and no doubt he must sometimes have wished that the information in that valuable work of reference had been somewhat more coloured and less concise. Lending his pen in Young England days to Tractarian ideas, a variety of reasons had since impelled him towards the Evangelical camp. It is not easy to conceive of his imagination being attracted by the Low Church, but he had been impressed by the importance of Protestantism as a political power to be captured ; Gladstone was a High Churchman, and that was in itself a reason why Disraeli should be the opposite ; and, finally and decisively, the Court was definitely hostile to Ritualism. No Puseyite could expect to be in good odour with the Queen.

That Disraeli's conduct of ecclesiastical affairs was either wise or happy cannot be claimed. He was seriously misled over the " No Popery " business of the early 'fifties, viewing as the start of a new conflagration what was only the leaping up of a dying flame. Wiseman, a Prince of the Church born at Seville, had alarmed the mid-century public by riding through the streets of London in a coach the heavy magnificence of which could only have failed to excite notice in the streets of Rome. Manning, never more like an Arch-deacon than when he was a Cardinal, could cause no such alarm, and by the time Disraeli was Prime Minister the fear of a new Romish danger was confined to a small and constantly diminishing section of the middle class. Darwin, too, had not written in vain. For thinking Christians outside the Roman Communion the apprehension was not that there might be too much faith but too little. Of Disraeli's anxiety to strengthen the Anglican Church there can be no doubt. He wanted it to be a strong power on the side of authority and against revolutions, but his notion of invigorating it by the appointment to its chief offices of divines whose chief recommendation was their fervent Protestantism had in the late 'sixties ceased to be practical. Moreover, he soon discovered that the Queen whom he wished to please did not share his views.

For the seat of Canterbury the royal candidate was Tait, a Broad Churchman. Most of the Queen's theological ideas had been made in Germany, and she liked a touch of rationalism in religion. Disraeli, on the contrary, dreaded and detested such tendencies. A Church which was "Broad," he perceived, would soon cease to be a Church, in the sense of commanding any popular allegiance. "No dogmas, no deans, Mr. Dean," he once said to a gaitered Latitudinarian. Or, still worse, nothing but deans. His personal attitude to religion, as we have seen, was that of Gibbon's Roman magistrate to polytheism. But if he were, in reference to the Christian theology, very much of the conforming sceptic, his belief in the miraculous cannot be questioned. At a diocesan meeting at Aylesbury in 1861 he had reviewed the various stages through which the German philosophical theologians had passed. First they had accepted the sacred narratives, explaining the supernatural incidents by natural causes; next they had proved that rationalism was irrational, and had reduced the sacred narratives to collections of ancient myths; finally they had fallen back on a revival of pagan pantheism:

No religious creed (he said) was ever destroyed by a philosophic theory; philosophers destroy themselves. Epicurus was as great a man, I apprehend, as Hegel; but it was not Epicurus who subverted the religion of Olympus.

In his own novels, though the foreground is often occupied by the politicians and the butterflies of Mayfair, the reader is always treading on the frontiers of another world. "Dreams, visions, prophecies," exclaims Contarini Fleming, "I believe in them all," and it is in a church, among the tombs of his ancestors, that his fate is mysteriously revealed to him. Venetia's prayer is given a miraculous answer. Tancred, who wants an archangel instead of an archbishop to guide him, does actually meet an angel on the top of Mount Sinai. Alroy is guided by spirits. To the critics this may be but the machinery of melodrama, but it is

Disraeli's taste rather than his sincerity which can be impugned. "Even Mormon counts more votaries than Bentham," says Sidonia, evidently with satisfaction.

Through the Queen's insistence, Tait was made Primate of All England, and Wilberforce, by far the most notable Churchman of the period, was not only not even considered for Canterbury, but was passed over for the Diocese of London, which Tait vacated, Disraeli suspecting him of Romish tendencies. Between them Queen and Minister blundered sadly. The High Church Party, vital and growing, was estranged. Wilberforce was thrown into the arms of Gladstone. The Rationalists, whom Disraeli would have checked, were encouraged; the Evangelicals, whom he patronised as much as the Court would allow, had no longer the strength to take advantage of a helping hand. On the ultimate consequences there is no need to dwell here; but the immediate results could not have been satisfactory either to the Prime Minister or to the Royal lady jointly responsible with him. In view of Gladstone's attacks on the Irish Establishment, "a good Church cry" was as necessary as when Mr. Tadpole recommended it to Lord Fitzbooby, but the cry, when uttered, failed to carry far. In Lancashire, thanks to the Derby influence, the Conservatives obtained in the election of 1868 an almost solid Anglican vote, but elsewhere there was little enthusiasm. It was, indeed, a paradox disastrous to the Conservatives that Gladstone, assailing the Church, should be recognised as an admirable Churchman, while Disraeli, its defender, could only figure as at best an Erastian and at worst a cynic.

But if the Irish affair produced no unity in the English Church it was certainly a distraction from the worrying problem of High, Low, and Broad, and it prevented the schism in the Conservative Party, arising from the Reform Act, from spreading. Disraeli's own feeling was that the Liberal demand for Disestablishment and Disendowment should be met with a proposal for concurrent endowments. In the past he had himself

denounced the Irish Establishment as "alien," and indeed its existence as a specially privileged corporation was a manifest absurdity. Even in the Diocese of Dublin, the capital of the Pale, there were nineteen parishes in which not a single member of the Established Church resided. In such circumstances Disraeli, and Stanley also, favoured some form of endowment for the Roman Catholics. But Cairns, the Lord Chancellor, an Ulster Protestant, was bitterly adverse, and the party as a whole did not favour the plan.

Gladstone's resolutions on Disestablishment were passed by the Commons, which disregarded Stanley's meek proposal that the whole matter should be left to the next Parliament. The situation was awkward. Resignation was the Government's natural course, and indeed appeared to be inevitable to many, since Ministers could not dissolve, as the new registers were still in preparation, and the Reform Bills for Scotland and Ireland were yet being considered. Disraeli, however, had in advance consulted the Queen, and was made aware of her strong reluctance to send for Gladstone in such a conjuncture. The Liberals in office, she represented, would at once proceed to the destruction of the Irish Church, and she would be asked to give her sanction to their measure, in violation, as she held, of her coronation oath. Disraeli, therefore, agreed to a novel plan for a deferred dissolution: Conservative Ministers to remain at their posts for another six months or so until a decision could be rendered by the reformed constituencies, Parliament in the meanwhile giving the Cabinet its "cordial co-operation." For such a plan there was no precedent, and any other Minister, in Disraeli's position, would either have declined to accept it, or would have put it forward as embodying the view of the Cabinet. In fact, the Prime Minister horrified his colleagues by bringing the scheme cut and dried from Osborne, while in Parliament he did not hesitate to link it with the Queen's name, and present it practically as a Royal command.

Everybody was shocked. "Ministers," wrote

Malmesbury, "are very angry with Disraeli for going to the Queen without calling a Cabinet." The Duke of Marlborough, who was Lord President of the Council, threatened to resign. John Bright described Disraeli's account of his interviews with Her Majesty as "a mixture of pompousness and servility." But when all is said it is clear that, however improper Disraeli's behaviour might be from the point of view of those who held that the Sovereign must be kept out of politics, it was quite proper from the point of view of Disraeli, who held that the Sovereign must be brought into politics. He was condemned as falsely representing the Queen as his ally. In fact there was no such falsity. The Queen was his ally, or, rather, in this special matter he was hers. It is certain that he realised the impossibility of saving the Irish Church by an appeal to the new electorate, and that he knew that the Conservatives must suffer in credit by staying in office after notice to quit. But to Disraeli there was, no doubt, a compensating gain. The Crown, as Palmerston had reason to know, had never become a cipher in politics, but its influence had for many years been carefully concealed. Disraeli was pleased that it should be exercised in full view of the public, and, as it were, in defiance of the House of Commons. One may add that the course he took would almost certainly have been that of any Conservative statesman on the Continent.

Meanwhile he had carefully improved his opportunities near the Royal person. The Queen had welcomed him as a Prime Minister ; she was to part from him, when his few months of office were over, as friend parts from friend. The secret of his success was simple, though the manœuvres by which it was achieved may have been complicated. Alone among her Ministers since Melbourne—and Melbourne was an old man petting a mere girl—he ventured to treat her as a woman, and the woman in her responded. It would undoubtedly be a mistake to interpret his jest concern-

ing the laying on of flattery with a trowel as implying either coarseness on his own side or lack of discrimination on the Queen's. There was quality no less than volume in his adulation ; it might be as extravagant as Romeo's, but it was as free from mere servility. Only a man perfectly appreciating the frontiers between the piquant and the respectful could have succeeded in the game Disraeli played—if it were indeed only a game. For it would be rash to conclude that he was merely acting a part when he babbled of primroses and snowdrops ; when he coupled the Queen's name with his own in the phrase " We Authors " ; when he wrote of her as the " Sovereign whom he adores," and " the most loved and illustrious being." He was probably the only person who ever went out of his way to compliment Queen Victoria on the possession of high æsthetic perception. He was probably the only person who, when she was past sixty, addressed to her the kind of compliments appropriate only to youth. But his own taste was perhaps not very remote from hers, and there is plenty of evidence that in his commerce with the other sex he was conscious neither of his own age nor that of those who interested him. And, if he flattered, he also loved flattery, and what flattery could equal that implied in the Queen's marked partiality ? After all, it was something, after a life largely spent in dodging duns and courting younger sons, to receive letters from the great Queen signed " ever yours affectionately and gratefully."

It was, no doubt, nothing to Disraeli's disadvantage that he could on occasion be a trifle peremptory. Ordinarily he addressed the Queen as if she were an absolute monarch. " It is yours, ma'am," he said when he had completed the purchase of the Khedive's interest in the Suez Canal. Nor was this submission merely verbal. He served the Queen rather than the party in the matter of the Irish Church, and in that of Tait's preferment he allowed the Royal wish to prevail against his own judgment. But this was at a time when he seems to have felt his conquest incomplete. With his

ascendancy fully established he mingled with his deference a suggestion of his own indispensability which at once enhanced the enjoyment of his flattery and raised the value of his devotion. Under his management business, which had been a trouble since the death of the Prince Consort, and was to be a nightmare during the five years of Gladstone's dominance, became a delight. The "Sovereign Mistress," whom Gladstone found cold and forbidding, who to John Morley "wore a moody, and, if I must confess, not an attractive look," was "wreathed in smiles" as she "tattled," and "glided about the room like a bird" when she received her "Primo." The Queen probably did not know that he often referred to her in correspondence as "The Faery." If she had known she would hardly have been displeased.

But it was written in the book of the electoral fates that, before the Queen had tasted the full flavour of Disraeli's courtiership, she should writhe under a lengthy experience of Gladstone's very different methods. The popular verdict against the Government was overwhelming. Disraeli, creating another Constitutional precedent, resigned before Parliament met. He had retained office in deference to the will of the Queen; he left office in deference to the will of the people. In the one case he set at naught a decision of the House of Commons; in the other he did not trouble to await the decision of the House of Commons. In the former case his own party was somewhat shocked; in the latter it was almost unanimous in approval. People did not seem to realise that he was tacitly denying the right of the House of Commons to be regarded as more than a collection of persons bound to carry out the mandate of the electorate, not only in the spirit but in the letter. In short, he had emphasised in the one action his respect for the Crown, in the other his respect for the people, in both his want of respect for the sovereignty of the House of Commons.

He seems momentarily to have thought of retirement. He was now sixty-four, and his wife was far in her

seventies. He had realised his ambition to be Prime Minister ; he had made his mark on English history. For the rest the future offered no inviting prospect. The country had declared itself decisively against the party he led. The people he had enfranchised had voted for his great rival, and he was too acute not to perceive the reason. On the one side were positive aims ; they might be wise or unwise, but they had positive sentiment behind them. On the other side, especially on the dominant issue of Ireland, were mere denials, and he had already had sufficient experience of the difficulty of getting the Conservatives to abandon a purely negative attitude. Temporarily he was, no doubt, discouraged, and inclined to seek again in literature a freer expression of his personality. The matter, however, was decided for him by the Queen. She parted with him as Prime Minister with a flattering regret. She insisted with an equally flattering vehemence that he should remain leader of the Opposition. Disraeli consented, and was rewarded by a signal mark of the Royal favour. He himself did not desire a peerage, but at his request a viscounty was bestowed on his wife, who became Lady Beaconsfield.

It is scarcely necessary for the present purpose to follow Disraeli in the routine of Opposition during the earlier years of Gladstone's great reforming administration. His health was at times bad ; his interest was little engaged ; some of his speeches were described by members of his own following as "wretched" and leaving no impression of "real earnestness and conviction."

It will suffice to sketch his attitude towards the enormous drama on the Continent which, before the Session of 1870 ended, diverted attention from domestic issues. What would have been Disraeli's attitude to the Franco-Prussian War had he been in power ? The answer must be dubious, and even his action as Opposition leader has been variously interpreted. To France

he had long been friendly ; of Prussia he once entertained a sleepless suspicion ; but it is evident that in 1868, when Prime Minister, his opinions regarding the latter Power had undergone a change. For information on foreign politics he seems to have placed reliance on the great Jews of international finance, and certain correspondence published in Mr. Buckle's biography¹ suggests that a member of the German branch of the Rothschild family had persuaded him that Bismarck was reducing Prussia's armaments. It may, further, be supposed that his views were coloured by the Germanophile sentiments of the Court. Whatever the case, it is certain that in the early part of 1870 he had no suspicion of the coming attack on France, and when the war clouds gathered it is highly possible that he was inclined to blame the French. Of the trouble threatened by the Hohenzollern candidature for the throne of Spain he spoke with amazing lightness :

I cannot induce myself to believe (he said in the House of Commons) that in the nineteenth century, with its extended sympathies and its elevating tendencies, anything so barbarous can occur as a war of succession.

It is difficult to understand, remembering the quality of the mind with which we are dealing, and its almost undue proneness to subtleties of diplomatic conception, how he could have been blind to the nature of the German scheme, or insensible to the natural alarm felt by the French at the prospect of a Prussian dependency beyond the Pyrenees. Later he was to blame Gladstone for being caught unprepared, but on his own showing he himself must have been equally taken by surprise, and with much less excuse, since he was interested in foreign affairs and Gladstone was not.

On July 15, two days after the Ems telegram had been falsified by Bismarck, and one day after the French Cabinet had decided on war, Gladstone reported to the Queen :

Mr. Disraeli made inquiries from the Government respecting

¹ Vol. v.

the differences between France and Prussia, and in so doing expressed opinions strongly adverse to France as the apparent aggressor.¹

This was a somewhat exaggerative interpretation of the long question addressed by Disraeli to the Prime Minister, but it was at least founded on fact. Knowing nothing of how Bismarck had converted "surrender into defiance" by a few deft strokes of his forger's pen, Disraeli seems to have concluded that the crisis was the consequence of Napoleon's ambitions. He erred, it is true, in company with the great majority of Englishmen of the time, but this thickness of vision was so untypical that we can only infer that his native faculty for guessing was paralysed by undue respect for the opinions of more highly placed but less gifted persons.

Two things, however, are to be noted. Although Disraeli may have too readily accepted the pro-Prussian point of view in the middle of July, he was within a fortnight suggesting in the House of Commons a line of policy which, had it been adopted by the Government, would have gone far to checkmate Bismarck's designs. Secondly, though he was accused by a political opponent of expressing opinions "strongly adverse to France," French writers generally regret that he was not in Gladstone's place at the time of their country's calamity. On August 1, when the first clash of the armies had actually arrived, he made a speech to which adequate attention was not given in this country. By the terms arranged at the Vienna Congress Britain and Russia had guaranteed to Prussia certain territories previously Saxon. Disraeli now proposed that Britain and Russia, acting in concert, should use this guarantee to secure that the terms of the post-bellum settlement should not be to their detriment or to that of Europe.

On this point M. Maurice Courcelle, in an interesting study of Disraeli, has written :

Tandis que M. Gladstone mettait ses principes humanitaires au service de la force, et que le même ministre qui devait

¹ *Morley's Life of Gladstone.*

ordonner plus tard l'inutile bombardement d'Alexandrie prenait l'initiative de cette coalition d'égoïsmes qui fut la Ligue des Neutres, Disraeli prit occasion, le 1^{er} Aout, d'une discussion sur l'ensemble du budget des dépenses, pour rappeler au Parlement que l'Angleterre qui avait signé tous les grands engagements internationaux de ce siècle pouvait y puiser le droit de s'entremettre entre les belligérants et d'arrêter une guerre meurtrière. . . . Il est permis de penser que si Disraeli avait dirigé la politique de l'Angleterre en 1870, la guerre eût pu être évitée, comme elle l'avait été en 1867, grâce à l'intervention amicale de Lord Derby dans les affaires de Luxembourg, comme elle le sera quelques années plus tard, lorsque Bismarck, inquiet du relèvement de la France, verra sa nouvelle tentative d'aggression de 1875 déjouée par la fermeté combinée du cabinet de Disraeli et du Tsar.

There is, of course, some doubt how far Disraeli's proposals for vigorous diplomatic action in 1870 were practicable. The difficulties on the Russian side, real as they were, could possibly have been overcome, and Austria might have been induced to join any combination to check Prussia. But the real difficulty was the state of Great Britain. Her armaments were in no condition to support diplomacy; sympathies were, to say the least, divided; and the Court leaned heavily to the German side. Disraeli, therefore, might have been obliged to remain as weakly neutral as the Liberal Government. On the other hand, he was quite free from the illusion common among the Liberals that the war was one in which England need only take the languid interest of a pained humanitarian people:

It is no common war (he said). It is the German Revolution, a greater political revolution than the French Revolution of last century. I do not say a greater, or as great, a social event. What its social consequences may be are in the future, but not a single principle accepted for guidance by all statesmen in the management of our foreign affairs up to six months ago any longer exists. . . . You have a new world, new influences at work, new and unknown objects and dangers with which to cope. . . . The balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers and feels the effect of this great change most is England.

England was soon to find that a quiet life is not to be had simply by shelving responsibility. Russia tore up the Black Sea Treaty, and Bismarck asked why she had not made the pieces even smaller. America peremptorily pressed those *Alabama* claims which Disraeli compared to a tribute exacted from a conquered people. All over the Continent British prestige sank to nothingness. Disraeli had disapproved the Palmerstonian policy of constant intervention ; but he drew a distinction between being neutral and being neuter, between continence and impotence. Bismarck had declared that a word from England to Napoleon would have prevented the war. The peace which followed the war could have been deprived of its most irritant features but for the embarrassed timidity which reigned in Downing Street.

Meanwhile, in the early summer, Disraeli had published the last but one of his novels. *Lothair*, according to Froude, is "a work of enduring value," and every page "glitters with wit or shines with humour." Its merit, however, was not everywhere recognised. In the *Quarterly Review* it was denounced as "a sin against good taste and justice," and derided as being "as dull as ditchwater and as flat as a flounder." The *Dublin Review* unkindly called its author "Titus Oates exposing the last Popish Plot in three volumes." Sir Leslie Stephen, though an admirer of Disraeli's earlier work, found it "a practical joke on a large scale."

Lothair certainly does not deserve Froude's description. It is not "immeasurably superior" to Disraeli's previous works. It gives no sign of the political sagacity and historical insight which redeem the literary defects of *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*. It possesses none of the autobiographical interest belonging to *Vivian Grey*, *Henrietta Temple*, and *Contarini Fleming*. It is far more tawdry than any of the novels, except *The Young Duke*. It could not, of course, be an entirely bad book. It contains epigrams of great brilliance, some of the minor characters are cleverly drawn, and it

can be accepted as a vivid if over-charged picture of the society of the day in certain of its aspects. But it lacks the spontaneity of the earlier books, and it is tainted with a radical insincerity. The series of novels which closed with *Tancred* contained much bombast. They were often defective in taste. Some of them set forth a code of honour strongly at variance with the English, or rather the European code. But they were inspired with a high seriousness and a fundamental nobility. The writer had something great to say on great subjects, and on the whole he said it greatly. In *Lothair* he was writing perhaps for money, perhaps for fame, perhaps for amusement, but not primarily because he had any message to deliver. In fact he had none. The time had gone when he could afford to tell the truth either about himself or about the country he lived in. *Lothair*, with immense vogue in its time, was in the worse sense a popular novel. It set out deliberately to please a frame of mind which could not have been the author's. "Disraeli," to quote M. Courcelle, "honoured and respected religion, but it would be difficult to say which religion." In *Lothair* he appears as the whole Protestant animal. As a politician, of course, he had already assumed this guise, and was to assume it again; but the interest of his earlier books is the separation of the novelist from the politician. The reader never feels the presence of Benjamin Disraeli, candidate or M.P., a man as mentally fettered as his own Tadpoles and Tapers. He is conscious of a free and adventurous spirit capable of understanding the past, glimpsing the future, and being somewhat careless of the present. In *Lothair*, on the contrary, we have the impression of the mere Right Honourable who, having hit on what he thinks a good cry, proceeds to make the most of it, without regard to anything but the expediency of the hour.

At the time of the novel's appearance there appeared to some people to be a prospect of carrying England off its feet by a new "No Popery" cry. The notion was hopefully entertained by certain Conservatives who, desiring the destruction of Gladstone, wished the public

to think of him, not as "the People's William," but as the High Churchman, the concealed Jesuit, the friend of Wilberforce and Manning, the agent of the Pope, and the ally of Irish Fenians. The proclamation of Papal Infallibility had caused a stir in limited but influential circles, and the conversion of a very wealthy young nobleman served to point the warnings of those who, like Froude, believed that "of the many dangers which threatened England there was none more insidious than the intrigues of Ultramontane proselytisers." Disraeli, with an instinct which can only be called journalistic, seized the case of the young Peer for the plot of his story. Lothair is, perhaps, the most fatuous hero in all fiction. It is not simply that he hovers helplessly through the greater part of three volumes between Rome and Canterbury—places sufficiently distinct. He is also inclined for a time to throw in his lot with the anti-clerical revolutionaries of Italy. In the case of a being so mentally confused it is obviously absurd to trouble about his final decision. But if the character of Lothair deprives the book of any pretence of philosophical seriousness, the machinery is too silly for a good sensational novel. Lothair is the centre of a plot in which the subtlest minds of the Roman hierarchy are engaged, and the whole object of the book is to put the simple-minded Briton on his guard against the devilish ingenuity of these unscrupulous agents of a noxious superstition. But on a candid reader the effect would be to convince him of the exceeding smallness of those dangers which oppressed the mind of Froude. The priests and prelates might be very wicked, but they could not, in view of their invincible stupidity, be very menacing.

Petticoat influence has brought Lothair to Mentana to fight for Garibaldi. Left for dead on the field, he is saved by the wife of a Roman tailor and nursed back to life by some English Roman Catholics. Then begins the effort to secure his conversion. The methods pursued are singular. First, he is asked to believe that the tailor's wife was none other than the Virgin; then

he is told, in defiance of facts of which he retains a perfect memory, facts also well known to many people, that he was wounded while serving, not with the Red Shirts, but with the Papal forces. Finally he is informed that, because he has been induced to walk in a procession carrying a lighted taper, he is committed irrevocably to the Roman Church. At this stage he takes literally to his heels, and is in the end safely married to a rigid Protestant, who has the further advantage of being a Duke's daughter.

The absurdity is, of course, less conspicuous in the book than in this bald summary. The passages in which Cardinal Grandison seeks to prove that Lothair knew nothing of what happened to himself at the battle of Mentana are, in fact, excellent satire. But the very excellence of the satire increases the presumption against the sincerity of the satirist. Disraeli may not have known much about the ways of Cardinals and Monsignori. But he knew well enough that Rome is served by high intelligence, and that the frauds he attributed to the plotters against Lothair were not intelligent. He was, in fact, writing down to his public in a manner inconsistent with his dignity both as an author and a great statesman.

The character sketches of *Lothair* are of varying merit. Cardinal Grandison, identified as Manning, was no doubt meant to represent that prelate. A few years earlier Disraeli had sought Manning's help over a scheme for a Roman Catholic University for Ireland, but the Irish proving intractable, he blamed the Cardinal. The portrait in *Lothair* was probably Disraeli's revenge. Manning was not greatly ruffled. Later, when on the same question of an educational settlement in Ireland he had differences with Gladstone, he remarked that when Disraeli lost his temper he kept his head, whereas Gladstone lost simultaneously temper and judgment. It was not only Papists, however, who suffered from the sharpness of the Disraelian pen in *Lothair*. In the Anglican Bishop whose "face beamed with Christian kindness" but who had "a twinkle in his eye which

seemed not entirely superior to mundane self-complacency," Wilberforce is easily recognisable. The Oxford professor who, about to dine with one of the aristocracy, "instead of indulging in his usual invectives against Peers and Princes . . . was content to dazzle and amuse him," was so evidently a caricature of Goldwin Smith that the victim was led to make public protest. Whenever Disraeli gives his wit fair-play *Lothair* is all that Froude claims for it. Whenever he has a moral to elaborate he becomes wearisome.

Lothair is, perhaps, the only one of his novels in which he can never be taken seriously; even *The Young Duke* has its touches of sincerity. Yet the public liked the book better than any he had written. Much of it amused them, and none of it puzzled them. *Lothair* is to-day an out-of-date topicality, a thing mainly of antiquarian interest. *Tancred*, an "Asian mystery" when it first appeared, has gained in significance in each decade which has since passed.

CHAPTER XIV

GLADSTONE'S greatest administration might have survived its errors; it perished of its virtues. Undeniably it was a Government of remarkable and in many ways of beneficent achievement. Its destructive energy was almost equalled by its capacity in building. It disestablished the Irish Church, abolished sectarian tests at the Universities, repealed Russell's panic-bred Ecclesiastical Titles Act, and, as part of a sweeping army reform, made an end of purchased commissions. But it also established popular education, passed the first of the Irish Land Acts, reformed the judicial system, recast the Civil Service, and made voting secret.

Nor were there any grievous mistakes to be set against its successes. One reform, the abolition of commissions by purchase, was achieved by a straining of the prerogative that scandalised many even of Mr. Gladstone's followers. But the main complaints to be discerned by him who studies the annals of the times concerned Lowe's attempt to tax lucifer matches, the appointment of a Cambridge graduate to a living which by statute should have been conferred on an Oxonian, and a Licensing Act which prevented people drinking on Sunday afternoons and in the small hours of the mornings.

To a later generation, inured to misgovernment—to a generation which has in some important particulars lost the very idea of liberty; which has seen the most high-handed acts carried out in the most casual way and justified with languid contempt of public opinion; which is subjected, so far as concerns the main tax-paying body, to a *corvée* of from two to five months out of the twelve in order to support the charges of

incapable and partial Governments, plundering the public purse for sectional donatives ; which is under the heel of a too powerful bureaucracy that, in its desire for still less restraint, is ever regardless of the spirit and sometimes impatient of the letter of the law ; which accepts waste and incompetence, muddled thought, and fuddled action as part of the natural law of things—to such a generation, chastised by the scorpions of war and reconstruction Governments, it may well seem strange that such unformidable whips could sting, and that Ministers who did so much work, including some manifestly good work, who did it so cheaply, and made so few blunders could earn in a few years profound unpopularity. But while Gladstone's Government was pure, honest, and well-intentioned, neither it nor its work was calculated to inspire the popular enthusiasm necessary to compensate it for the antagonism that all reform must necessarily engender. Gladstone, says Froude, was "inattentive to the symptoms of the temper of the people." The fact was that he rarely thought of the people, or rather that to him the people meant the middle class. He, no doubt, regarded the abolition of purchase in the army as a measure of democratic reform which must appeal to the masses. But, in fact, the masses cared nothing whether the test for a commission were ability to sign a large cheque or capacity to pass a fairly stiff examination in Latin and Algebra. And the masses, from their point of view, were fully justified in such indifference. They knew perfectly well that a commission was still beyond the reach of a poor man. They guessed, rightly, that influence would still count. They guessed, again rightly, that competitive examination was no infallible means of getting good and excluding bad officers. Again, Gladstone thought, no doubt, that in setting up elementary schools he was conferring the greatest boon a statesman could extend to the common people. But in the nature of things it was a boon that could not be immediately appreciated, and would, by some, be thought no boon at all, but an act of tyranny.

The virtues of the Government, in brief, were not those which chiefly appeal to the masses, while they were emphatically those which infuriate vested interests. On the other hand, the administration had precisely the faults which inspire popular contempt. It was a little parochial, a little mean, a little fussy, a little domineering, a little unctuous. Its foreign policy imparted a sense of humiliation. Its Irish policy seemed to have the inspiration more of panic than of generosity. Many good people were afraid of the Republicanism of a section of Radicals for whom Sir Charles Dilke, soon to be joined by Joseph Chamberlain, spoke. Nor was the figure of Gladstone at that time quite what it afterwards became. He was able and industrious, but, though perhaps more of a reality, was far less a legend than the Gladstone of the 'eighties. The middle classes respected him as a financier and a moralist, but he had very little hold on the working men, and what Froude calls his "slightly ostentatious piety" seemed in those days somewhat distastefully incongruous with his position as the head of a composite majority which, on the whole, was far from friendly to the Church, or, indeed, to religion in any form. Those who viewed Gladstone as a reckless innovator, those who thought of him as a concealed Tory, and those who contrasted his timid foreign policy with the gay recklessness of Palmerston, made up between them a decided majority of the British population.

Disraeli, perhaps more from lassitude than through design, had pursued from the first a highly prudent course. He had discouraged those of his followers who would have resisted every measure to the bitter end, and had contented himself with just that amount of criticism which would damage the Government in the eyes of the nation without rousing its supporters to increased enthusiasm. His phrases were of the kind which are remembered long after their occasion is forgotten. "We have legalised confiscation, we have consecrated sacrilege, we have condoned treason" was one. Another was his famous description of the

position of the Government in 1872, when it experienced a sudden decline in its popularity :

As time advances extravagance is being substituted for energy. The unnatural stimulus is subsiding. Their paroxysms end in prostration. Some take refuge in melancholy, and their eminent chief alternates between a menace and a sigh. As I sat opposite the Treasury Bench the Ministers reminded me of one of those marine landscapes not very unusual on the coasts of South America. You behold a range of exhausted volcanoes. Not a flame flickers on a single pallid crest. But the situation is still dangerous. There are occasional earthquakes, and ever and anon the dark rumblings of the sea.

" You have now had four years of it," he told Gladstone, in 1873. " You have despoiled churches. You have threatened every corporation and every endowment in the country. You have examined into everybody's affairs. You have criticised every profession and vexed every trade. No one is certain of his property and nobody knows what duties he may have to perform to-morrow. I believe that the people of this country have had enough of this policy of confiscation." This is the one infallible appeal to any over-governed people. It was precisely the appeal of Mr. Bonar Law's watchword of " tranquillity " in 1922.

Disraeli, like Mr. Bonar Law, was himself merely careful to give no " programme "—the country, he saw, was sick of programmes. All he recommended was " sanitary legislation "—*Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas* :

Pure air, pure water, the inspection of unhealthy habitations, the adulteration of food, these and many kindred matters may be legitimately dealt with by the legislature.

This was his pronouncement at a great meeting at Manchester in 1872. A little earlier, when driving to St. Paul's to take part in a service of thanksgiving for the recovery of the Prince of Wales from a dangerous illness, he had been loudly cheered by the crowd, and it was now apparent that in the very home of Free Trade Radicalism the tide had turned against Gladstone.

His speech declared that the programme of the Conservative Party was to "maintain the institutions of the country," and chief among those institutions was the Throne. To the stability of the Throne he attributed the accumulation of capital, the elevation of labour, the improvement of cultivation, and even "those admirable factories which cover your district." He praised the wisdom and experience of the Sovereign. He lauded the influence of the Crown as a solvent of party prejudice. He glorified the Royal Family as a pattern in a country where "the home is revered and the hearth is sacred." And he let it be understood that the only dependable defender of the Throne was the Conservative Party.

A little later in the same year, Midsummer Day, 1872, he addressed a meeting of the National Union of Conservative Associations at the Crystal Palace. The National Union was his own work. Though the last man in the world to revel in the details of Party organisation, he had seen that a caucus was necessary, and had placed the task of its construction in the capable hands of Mr. John Gorst. In due time the Tory caucus was imitated by Joseph Chamberlain, and thenceforward it was all but impossible for an independent Member to reach the House of Commons. If such a system had obtained in his youth, Disraeli himself must have remained for ever an outsider, but as leader of the party it gave him a well-drilled and subordinated following whose seats depended on his will. The caucus was the natural corollary to the Reform Act. The masses had the vote, but the vote gave them only the choice between two sets of masters. "Disraeli's judicious admirers," says Mr. Buckle, "are hardly likely to claim much credit for him on the score of this fact." His impartial critics, however, will not miss its significance.

In his address to the faithful at the Crystal Palace Disraeli began to preach that gospel of Empire with which his name was to be chiefly connected in posthumous tradition. India had always fascinated, the

colonies had generally wearied him. But India was the business chiefly of the upper and upper middle class, and it was probably the consciousness that Canada and Australia were of more interest to the newly-enlarged electorate that explained his sudden enthusiasm for the white constituents of "the Empire of England." Disraeli may seem to have anticipated Joseph Chamberlain in talking of an "Imperial Tariff," and "constant and continuous relations between the Colonies and the home Government" by means of "some responsible council in the metropolis." But there was little really in common between the two points of view. Disraeli, though an alien, looked at the colonies from an English angle. Chamberlain, though the most English of men, adopted mainly the Colonial point of view.

The three points of the programme, monarchy, Empire, and social reform, made an attractive combination. Bread and butter practicality, plus the jam of romance, were excellent; and if the child, after all, should come off poorly in the matter of victuals, there was always the gleam of the Crown and its attendant jewels to keep it amused. Gladstone, with his mind already more than half given to Ireland, had nothing so attractive to offer. As to foreign policy, Disraeli suggested "proud reserve," or, in other words, a compromise between the old Palmerstonian recklessness and the new Gladstonian gospel of peace at any price.

Disraeli, for the first time, became in a true sense a popular figure. He had never been a middle-class favourite, and politics, so far as they were not an aristocratic game, had so far been a middle-class interest. But the poor were beginning to take a hand, and the poor were attracted by him. Wherever he went the crowd cheered for "Dizzy." He was liked by the artisan, the small clerk, and all working-class people of a humorous turn. They enjoyed his jokes, approved his velvet coat, relished his humanity, recognised with joy that he was not a Puritan, and dimly divined that

he was something nearer to them than Gladstone or Bright. These manifestations of popular affection reacted on his own party, which began to realise his full value as an asset. It was felt that he was bringing Conservatism to the end of its long sojourn in the wilderness, and that before long he would give compensation, in the spoils of office, for such sacrifices as he had imposed on them. Impressed by the favour of the Court, the aristocracy had forgotten half its prejudice against him, and a new generation of the middle class included many who, in revulsion against the ostentatious rectitude of Gladstone, thought kindly of one who, while not a mere comedian, could regard much of life in the spirit of comedy.

In such circumstances he should have been well contented with the world. Yet the spirits which had availed him in adversity seem to have lost some of their elasticity in his dawning prosperity. Fortune, as usual, refused to come with both hands full, and the full meal of glory found him with but a poor stomach. In the last month of 1872 his wife, who had long been ill, died. It was a terrible wrench. She had adored her great man. He had been happy in romanticising a grateful affection, while enjoying the practical side of her assiduous care. The loss of her deranged his whole life ; and with his grief, abundant and sincere though it was, there mingled a large element of self-pity. He saw before him a prospect of homelessness that appalled. He had long lost all bachelor instincts ; he cared little now for the society of men except when working with them ; and for some months he was the victim of a profound melancholy. "Marriage," he wrote to Gladstone, in one of the few gracious letters that passed between them, "is the greatest earthly happiness, when founded on complete sympathy. That hallowed lot was mine."¹

Some men, thus smitten, would have crept into a

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

corner with their grief. Others would have sought relief by intense absorption in work. Neither was Disraeli's way. He fought sorrow with the weapon of an augmented levity. On the public side he gave, not more, but less, of himself to politics. On the private side, while never losing a reverent and affectionate memory for his wife, he sought such compensations as were available to an elderly invalid whose heart was the youngest part of him. Politically he must be reckoned, despite the brilliance of his position and prospects, a disappointed man. He had been Prime Minister. He was leader of a great party. He was almost certain to be Prime Minister again. All the ambitions of Vivian Grey had been wonderfully realised—but too late. The power was ebbing in him. He had nearly completed the span of life. He was becoming a valetudinarian, and gout was soon to make him hobble. In every sense that mattered he was isolated—without intimate friends, without hearty colleagues, without even pupils. He was intellectually separated from all Englishmen, and from his party most of all. In old age Palmerston had enjoyed his greatest political comfort. But Palmerston's effort had been easy, because in the main he represented the English mind of the period. There was no such affinity between the mind of England and the mind of Disraeli. Time was when he might have hoped, as a dictator, to lay a course and bid his followers abide it. Old as he now was, the strain of such an effort was too great; nine cases out of ten, he realised, he must go their way.

He therefore laid down a new course of life. In politics he would play an old man's part, giving no more of himself than was strictly necessary. In private he sought, for the satisfaction of that in him which remained youthful, a renewal of his youth. Feeble he might be in body and old in mind, but his slowing pulse could still be stirred by the interest of a woman. The strange story revealed for the first time in the pages of Mr. Buckle has distinguished parallels in the history of the East and of the Continent,

but is almost unique in our annals. Disraeli had become a widower only a few months when he had again given his heart to a woman, or rather to two women. Many years before he had enjoyed the lively society of a bevy of girls, the daughters of Lord Forrester, who was his neighbour in Buckinghamshire. Two only of the sisters were now alive, Anne, Countess of Chesterfield, a widow, and the Countess of Bradford, wife of a sporting peer who had held a Court appointment in Disraeli's Administration. Lady Chesterfield was two years his senior; Lady Bradford fifteen years his junior. That master of the art of life, Harold Skimpole, classified his children; there was a Beauty daughter, a Sentiment daughter, and a Comedy daughter. Disraeli seems to have bestowed his homage on somewhat similar principles. Apparently he wanted different qualities which neither of the sisters could provide severally, but which both could supply jointly. Lady Chesterfield, by years and temperament, was fitted to appeal to that part of him which wanted mothering; he was happy in her grave and gentle sagacity. On the other hand, he was charmed by the archness and vivacity of Lady Bradford. Whether even so consummate a lover and diplomatist could have maintained sentimental relations with two unrelated women is doubtful. But the peculiar circumstances allowed him without serious difficulty to enjoy the society of each separately, and of both together. There were, indeed, ripples on the current of the romance. That was inevitable, having regard not only to the difficult situation of the two ladies, but the different degrees in which their admirer acknowledged their fascination. Up to a point they were both perfectly satisfied to share his devotion. Lady Chesterfield, at any rate, seems at first to have found unmixed pleasure in his affectionate homage. In Lady Bradford, however, there was a certain emotional flutter, for if on the one hand she might deem herself to have attained the age of safety she was still a wife, and it was perturbing to receive letters from the most famous man in England

conceived in the language of a lovesick stripling. Time and time again the "adored being," the "most fascinating of women," whose "every movement was grace," and whose countenance was of one "radiant innocence," felt it incumbent on her to check the enthusiasm of her admirer and abate with cold sense the "turbulence" of his heart. But she relented when he exclaimed against the "cruelty of farewells," spoke of his "hunger" for her presence, and implored her to vouchsafe him, loving as he loved, a more frequent sight of her "adorable person."¹

To Lady Chesterfield, Disraeli wrote in another style. He seems to have realised that he could not, without being both ridiculous and insulting, act Sylvius to her Phoebe. His letters were touched with gallantry, but free from ardour; and when he proposed marriage it was in a manner befitting the age of both parties. Two reasons, no doubt, prompted his offer, and one fully accounts for her refusal. Craving for female companionship and sympathy, Disraeli wanted a wife; he would have preferred Lady Bradford, but since Lady Bradford was not free Lady Chesterfield was the next best choice. Moreover, as the husband of the one sister, he could enjoy to an extent impossible in other circumstances the society of the other. But, though Disraeli understood women better than most men, his proposal shows that he had still something to learn. Even at seventy the female heart is not immune from some touch of jealousy. Lady Chesterfield could be content to share Disraeli, as an admirer, with her sister. She would not agree to marry him in the knowledge that her sister was and would remain the favourite.

No long estrangement followed her refusal. Disraeli continued to see much of the sisters, and in the course of the next few years wrote them several hundreds of letters, some strictly personal, some dealing with matters of public concern. With Lady Chesterfield the tone is for the most part cousinly and even brotherly, and

¹ Quotations from Buckle, vol. vi.

it is easy to see that after the first stage both accepted the situation, and were ready to be dear friends in every sense but the French one. With Lady Bradford, on the other hand, there are the alternations of tiff and reconciliation, of chiding and tenderness, which tell their own plain tale. She complains of his extravagance; he mourns her reserve; she relents for a moment, and a gush of dangerous sentiment compels her once again to be cruel. Laura was never more tantalising or Petrarch more patient. The lady, woman-like, could not bear to lose him, but was resolved to keep him at the lowest possible price, and she did, as nearly as the thing could be done, succeed in eating her cake and having it. She enjoyed all the satisfaction—and it seems to have been considerable—of seeing the greatest man of the day languishing for her, while she was able to assure herself that she had not departed, even in spirit, from wifely propriety. The man's case was perhaps less comfortable; there is a kind of heart-ache running through the letters to Lady Bradford that checks the smile which their extravagance would otherwise provoke. One feels that what may be a trifle to Dulcinea, herself something of a trifle, is bitter earnest to the poor Don, who, however absurd, is no trumpery thing. More than once Disraeli reveals a minor secret of State to Lady Bradford by way of a bribe, and in the hope of eliciting a word of tenderness. The word is duly given, but nothing more substantial. Such a situation would have been scandalous had there existed a suggestion of deceit or impropriety. It would have been merely ridiculous had the philandering been altogether unserious. Disraeli's special character, with his yearning loneliness, makes it simply pathetic.

The friendship with the sisters endured to the end of his life. How much concerning it was known to contemporaries is a little difficult to decide. Disraeli, writing love-letters to Lady Bradford from his seat in the House of Commons, cannot be said to have attempted concealment; and the special messengers who carried his billets, and who were instructed to

wait if necessary all day for a reply, must have been miraculously discreet if they never dropped a hint as to the nature of the case. Yet no fragment of the strange story seems to have reached print until Mr. Buckle told it in full. It is true that the press of the period was more reticent concerning such matters than it had been, or than it was to be, yet the absence of even the most oblique reference to the affair is curious. In some degree, of course, the age of the parties guarded them, but the very facts which forbade scandal also invited laughter; and that malicious wit found nothing for its exercise, or was afraid to wound, must be reckoned a proof that there was in Disraeli a dignity for which he was rarely given sufficient credit. He used to say in his later years, when told that some attractive woman wished to meet him, that he was "too old for that sort of thing"; but this was generally an excuse for avoiding somebody whose husband wanted a title or an office. Disraeli was never too old to feel interest in women, never too old to be amused by them; never too old to be fooled by them. But his ideals of womanhood were high, and, though he may have played with fire in the case of the mysterious Henrietta, he was curiously lacking in the temperament which would have made his elderly infatuation merely unpleasant. Lady Cardigan's claim that he proposed to her shortly after his wife's death is inherently improbable. But it is quite possible that she proposed to him. In her *Recollections* she displays a significant animus against Lady Bradford.

It was perhaps his emotional preoccupation which contributed to the singularly judicious line followed by Disraeli during the last years of the Gladstone Administration. Almost uniformly he acted on the principle of giving the Government enough rope to hang itself. The fated cord turned out to be the Irish University Bill of 1873. This measure was designed to please everybody, or, at least, to offend nobody. In fact, it

was derided by English educationists like the blind Professor Fawcett; it was equally hateful to Irish Roman Catholics and Irish Protestants; and on March 11 it was refused a second reading by a majority of three. Disraeli, after a long period of restraint, had, seeing how things were going, spoken against it with full vigour, though it was the Government's record in general, rather than the Bill itself, that he arraigned.

The Government resigned, but Disraeli, who had had enough of office without power, refused to carry on in conditions which would imply "no wholesale censure but retail humiliation."¹ Nor would he form a ministry with a view to dissolution; "the pear, he judged, in a party sense, was nearly but not quite ripe."² Thus Gladstone had reluctantly to return to office, angrily conscious that the longer he remained the greater must be his loss of prestige. A few months later his position was further weakened by what in those days, when Parliament watched expenditure with great jealousy, was considered a grave financial scandal. A sum of money had been used without Parliamentary sanction for the extension of the telegraphic service. In the twentieth century a few scoffing or menacing words from an Under-Secretary would have put critics in their place, but Gladstone was compelled to reconstruct his Government, and, taking himself the vacant Exchequer, found in his plan to abolish the income-tax what he conceived to be a good election issue on which to appeal to the country in the following year.

Nothing could have shown more clearly his small understanding of the new electorate. The poor voters of the boroughs cared nothing for the remission of taxes which they did not pay, and as the income-tax in those favoured days amounted only to threepence in the pound, even the classes most immediately concerned were moderate in their gratitude. Indeed, when it was understood that abolition would mean stinting the defences, there was an outburst of patriotic

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

² Marriott's *England since Waterloo*.

indignation, of which Disraeli took deft advantage. Remarking casually that the Conservative Party always favoured reduction of taxation, he fell fiercely on the Government for what he described as its neglect of British interests abroad. "A little more energy in foreign policy, and a little less in domestic legislation," would, he said, have been better for the country.

He had read the public mind aright. The country was amazingly prosperous. It was enormously tired of the very word Reform. It did not object to the spending of a little money more or less, but it was uneasily conscious that England under Gladstone had not made a very splendid figure in the eyes of the outside world. "It's mean, guv'nor ; it's mean, that's what it is ; it's mean," said the Dickensian prize-fighter to his patron, who was all the time under the impression that he had done something rather noble. The British public was in the mood of the Game Chicken ; and Mr. Gladstone was no less shocked than Mr. Toots by stupidity so perverse.

Disraeli had expected a majority, but the size of it surprised him. Never since the split of 1846 had a Conservative Prime Minister held office except on sufferance. He was now master, and, as the event proved, master in a sense far beyond his nominal strength. While he had a clear majority of fifty, the Opposition was utterly demoralised. Nothing was wanting to the Disraelian triumph, for he had what Gladstone had always lacked, the enthusiastic sympathy of the Queen. From Windsor Lady Ely wrote immediately after the Liberal Prime Minister's resignation : "My dear mistress will be very happy to see you again. . . . You understand her so well."¹

What were his feelings in the hour of victory ? Six years before, on becoming Prime Minister for the first time, he had said, "It is twenty years too late." His sense of the mockery of fate must now have been

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

intensified. In everything he had written he had glorified youth, discredited mere experience, derided age ; and all this was no mere pose. What he said in *Coningsby* undoubtedly remained his fixed conviction when he had himself passed into the sere and yellow leaf :

Don John of Austria won Lepanto at twenty-five. . . . Gaston de Foix was only twenty-three when he stood a victor on the plain of Ravenna. . . . Gustavus Adolphus died at thirty-eight. . . . Cortes was little more than thirty when he gazed on the golden cupolas of Mexico. . . . Innocent III, the greatest of the Popes, was the despot of Christendom at thirty-seven. . . . John de Medici was a Cardinal at fifteen. . . . Pascal wrote a great work at sixteen, and died at thirty-seven, the greatest of Frenchmen. . . . Then there were Bolingbroke and Pitt, both Ministers when other men left off cricket. . . . Grotius was in great practice at seventeen, and attorney-general at twenty-four. And Acquaviva, Acquaviva was General of the Jesuits, ruled every cabinet in Europe, and colonised America before he was thirty-seven. . . . The history of heroes is the history of Youth.

But though he, of all men, was least deceived as to the meaning of his triumph, he could still feel gratification in the personal success. Montagu Corry, his private secretary, wrote during the elections :

The Carlton is crowded till midnight ; all the dear " old lot " whom we know so well—all the *frondeurs* and the cynics, professors, *now*, of a common faith—cry for " The Chief."

That part of the business must have been as potent as the kindest of Lady Bradford's letters in stirring the pulse of the valetudinarian. If his delight was cynical, it was none the less delight. All the men who had intrigued against him, scoffed at him, slighted him, scorned him as a Jew, were now prone before the dazzling trophy of his success. His past was forgotten, or rather only remembered with reverence. How clever of him to realise, when men were talking in terror of the " leap in the dark," that the " residuum " emancipated in 1867 would prove a Conservative asset ! How wonderfully he had worked, watched, and waited

all these years, "educating" his party against its inclinations. For the man who had broken the power of Liberalism, who had shown that the Conservative Party, well organised, could appeal successfully to the working-man, there was now the frenzy of idolatry. Mean pride paid him mean homage. The aristocrats did low obeisance. Salisbury himself, whom Disraeli had characteristically approached through his step-mother, Lady Derby, was reconciled—ready, nay, eager to join the new Cabinet. No cleft or fissure impaired the new solidarity of the party. And to crown all, a month later, Gladstone, baffled and beaten, retired from the Liberal leadership in circumstances which made even Liberals feel a disadvantageous contrast with the calm courage, patience, and perseverance with which his rival had faced years of Opposition and of office without power. Time was to prove how much political life was left in Gladstone. But few then believed that he would return, and Disraeli could indulge the pride that he had outlasted a rival five years his junior—one, moreover, of whose malignity to himself he was convinced. During his last six months of life, while sitting to Sir John Millais for his portrait, he told the artist that he had never disliked Gladstone, but had never understood him. It is certain that Gladstone for his part was even further from understanding and perhaps from charity.

The Government Disraeli formed was well named the Ministry of all the Opportunities. It is not easy to parry the gibe that most of the opportunities were missed. Its foreign policy now appears to have been, on the whole, mistaken. It did nothing to put into practice the policy of Imperial consolidation. It let pass a golden chance of settling the Irish question. Nothing is more ordinary than to find in Conservative speeches and writings references to the necessity of getting back to or maintaining "Disraelian principles." A candid inquirer is baffled in the attempt to understand this dark saying. Disraeli undoubtedly had principles. But they were by no means generally

deducible from his practice, and they have never been the principles of the modern Conservative Party.

The Session of 1874 should have given contemporaries a very fair answer, so far as domestic affairs were concerned, to the question, "What will he do with it?" Left alone Disraeli would apparently have done nothing—on the whole, considering his years and health, an intelligent thing to do. But powerful interests decided adversely to his dream of one year at least of rest in thankfulness. The bishops saw their opportunity to bring forward a long-meditated attempt to "put down ritualism." Who better as the agent of such a policy than that fervent Protestant, the author of *Lothair*? An even higher personage than Archbishop Tait desired to free the country from the taint of idolatry. When the Primate introduced his Public Worship Regulation Bill the Queen expressed her "earnest wish" that the Government would go as far as it could, without embarrassment to itself, to facilitate the passage of the measure, thus "satisfying the Protestant feeling of the country."¹

In fact, Disraeli could go no step without "embarrassing the Government," and even endangering it. For both Salisbury and Gathorne-Hardy were High Churchmen who could hardly fail to regard with disfavour this partial measure. They might accept a Bill to discipline alike those who were too High and those who were too Low. The Book, the whole Book, and nothing but the Book was a tenable proposition. But Tait himself, while calling for terrors against clergymen who lighted candles, was an innovator who wanted the Athanasian Creed omitted from the Church service. It was clearly a case of heterodoxy being the other man's "doxy." However, there it was. The Queen could not have a blunt "No," and there was no reasonable excuse to offer on the ground of the pressure of other business. Disraeli was forced to afford facilities, and he could not escape appearing personally as the champion of the Bill. It was productive of some

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

piquant situations. Harcourt, the Erastian, quarrelled with Gladstone, the Arminian; Disraeli reproved that "great master of gibes and flouts," his newly-rejoined lieutenant Salisbury. The measure was futile, and worse than futile. While it encouraged many Churchmen to question whether the State and Church were after all desirable, it gave a considerable impetus to the practices it set out to abolish. Disraeli jeered at "the Mass in masquerade"; great-hearted curates thenceforward celebrated the Mass with no masquerade at all. For every candle extinguished a hundred more were lighted, and the once respectable word "Protestant" became merely an abusive epithet. But, "pretentiously and irritatingly futile" as Mr. Traill in his *Life of Lord Salisbury* pronounces the Bill, Disraeli's handling of it was amazingly clever. Despite acute differences in the Party and the Cabinet, the split was confined to the Bill itself, there were no resignations, and none of the Prime Minister's colleagues seem to have borne any grudge against him. Gladstone would have shed half-a-dozen Ministers over an issue so troublesome. It was impossible, however, that Disraeli's charm could soothe the wider circle which lay beyond the power of his personal appeal. High Churchmen in general were deeply angered, and later, when Disraeli was absorbed in foreign politics, were ready to put the worst construction on his acts. Gladstone, on the other hand, became, in the words of the late Mr. G. W. E. Russell, "the delight and glory of the Ritualists," and the fact had considerable influence in the Liberal revival of the late 'seventies.

The only other notable feature in the Session of 1874 was the Irish discussion, in which the Prime Minister intervened with a speech full of smart debating points. "It might be urged," he said, "that they (the Irish) had been conquered by Cromwell. What of it? Had not Cromwell previously conquered England? Why should my eloquent and imaginative friends try to extract a peculiar grievance out of a common misfortune?" "Entertaining prattle," wrote

Mr. F. H. O'Donnell of this speech. Disraeli seems to have regarded his achievement with a considerable lack of humour. He actually wrote to Lady Bradford the next day that Home Rule had "received its *coup de grâce*."¹ Perhaps he believed so. Home Rule was then a novel idea, and Isaac Butt was not the man to make it impressive; while Disraeli was within measurable distance, by this time, of taking the conventional Conservative view of the Irish, if not of Ireland. However, "his cosmopolitan spirit," says Mr. O'Donnell,² "never descended to the nadir of prejudice of the British Philistine," and, though he chaffed the Home Rulers, he treated them with civility, while they on their part never forgot that he and Bentinck and Manners had once befriended them. But, as Prime Minister and a rather tired old man, Disraeli did think of Ireland as a pestilent nuisance, all the more because he could not get it entirely off his conscience. In the autumn of 1874 he contemplated going across the Channel, and it was perhaps a misfortune for two nations that the gout and an unimaginative friend's expostulations prevented the visit. Though he had lost the vivid sympathy with Ireland which distinguished him in youth, and his private correspondence suggests that he thought the Home Rulers troublesome cattle, he still remained enough of the statesman to realise that there should be a Conservative policy for Ireland as an alternative to recurrent coercion, and study of the problem on the spot might have moved him to a fit of energy.

But energy was now not superabundant. The line of least resistance had increasing charm. Besides, it was pleasant to have more time for epistolary flirtation with Lady Bradford and bandying compliments with the Queen. Her Majesty was grateful for his gallantry in the cause of true religion, and the Queen's gratitude

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

² *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party*.

meant much—exactly how much it is still a puzzle to say. One thing, of very great importance, it meant to the enfeebling man of seventy, and that was comfort. A pleased Queen asked him to sit down when he had the gout, whereas poor Lord Derby, when the agony was greatest on him, had always had to stand. Also, the Royal favour secured him from one of the standing bugbears of Victorian statesmen, the frequent journey to Balmoral. Once, when he fell ill there, the Queen visited him in his bedroom, and was so sorry for him that she excused further attendance in that palace of freezing etiquette and icy physical atmosphere. No mark of condescension left Disraeli more grateful. His race has generally avoided Scotland, and he had little passion for Balmoral, even though a place was found for him on the famous tartan hearthrug which was pressed by so few non-royal feet.

Disraeli had by this time learned the art of taking things easily; and his very economy of effort was generally an advantage. In the days of his youthful sincerity, when he really would have delighted to practise what he preached, he won the reputation of a dangerous charlatan. Now, when age had robbed him of his energy, and security had made him careless, his very faults were accounted high statesmanship. Hazard, says Marshal Foch, often passes in war for calculation. In politics timidity commonly wins the praise of judgment, and sloth is applauded as circumspection. It was now Disraeli's lot to enjoy what was largely the unearned increment of applause. He remains the most quotable of all the great Victorian Ministers, largely because he made no attempt to settle the problems which he discussed. He is entitled to so high a respect for his thought, sometimes profound and always original, that it comes almost as a shock to find how little he actually did when he reached office with power. But if he thus disappoints any candid new-comer in the field of research who has hitherto accepted hearsay for fact, his own saying of "Twenty years too late" must be remembered. "I have climbed

to the top of the greasy pole," he once said. Climbing the greasy pole for half a century is an exhausting business.

Outside politics Disraeli signalled his accession to supreme power by a notable gesture. "Can nothing be done for literature?" he wrote to the Queen, suggesting that "Mr. Tennyson could sustain a baronetcy," while Carlyle might be offered the Grand Cross of the Bath, together with a pension not less than that which the Queen's grandfather had bestowed on Dr. Johnson.¹ There was, no doubt, a mixture of motives. Derby had suggested to the Prime Minister that to do something for Carlyle, who, if he disliked Disraeli, loathed Gladstone, would be "a really good political investment." It is, therefore, exaggerative to speak of Disraeli's action as "magnanimity." Yet, considering that Carlyle had written about him not only savagely but with insolence, as a "superlative Hebrew juggler," the grace with which the step was taken marks Disraeli, despite those occasional floridities which an Occidental is prone to censure as vulgarities when they are only the graces of an alien, as a man of princely mind. The letter he wrote to Carlyle, despite a few pomposities on the duty of Governments to "recognise intellect," is fine both in feeling and expression :

I have advised the Queen (he wrote) to offer to confer a baronetcy on Mr. Tennyson, and the same distinction should be at your command, if you liked it. But I have remembered that, like myself, you are childless, and may not care for hereditary honours. . . . I will speak with frankness on another point. It is not well that in the sunset of life you should be disturbed by common cares. I see no reason why a great author should not receive from the nation a pension as well as a lawyer and a statesman. Unfortunately, the personal power of Her Majesty in this respect is limited ; but still it is in the Queen's capacity to settle on an individual an amount equal to a good fellowship.¹

In a letter full of straight feeling and twisted English Carlyle declined both honour and money. But he was,

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

says Froude, "sensible of the compliment, and touched at the quarter from which it came." As a political investment the offer bore no interest. Carlyle, with great impartiality, continued to belabour both Disraeli and Gladstone, and was soon to become one of the fiercest critics of the former's patronage of the Un-speakable Turk. Tennyson, for his part, preferred to wait for a peerage. He might have worded his refusal more strongly had he known that Disraeli had referred to him, in the letter to Carlyle, as a "real poet," but not perhaps a "great" one.

Disraeli was ever generous, as well as placable, and if we omit the case of Peel it might almost be said that, while he never forgot a friend, he never remembered an enemy. His kindness to literary men has earned a posthumous reward. His general dealings with the craft of the pen were devoid of the superciliousness so common in English politicians. He was, perhaps, inclined to under-rate the dull thinker, but he had always a pleasant word, and often a useful thought, for the kind of writer who had no recommendation but his own genius. Consequently, he was respected as few politicians are by literary men, and after his death they secured reverence for his memory. When he had been forty years in his grave there were still one or two old men in literature and the press to hand on to youth the tradition that he, alone among British politicians, never failed in his sympathy with talent not immediately useful to him.

CHAPTER XV

ALEXANDER MACDONALD, one of the two first Labour Members of the House of Commons, declared in 1879 that the Conservatives had done more for the workers in five years than the Liberals had done in fifty. The importance of the social reform legislation introduced in conformity with the policy of *sanitas sanitarum* has, no doubt, been exaggerated, and Disraeli himself comically overestimated it when he wrote that he had "settled the long and vexatious conflict between capital and labour." Nevertheless he certainly did prove himself much more alive than Gladstone to the needs of the masses.

The Artisans' Dwelling Act, introduced by Cross, a new member of the Administration, a Lancashire man with a knowledge of law and commerce, was a not unimportant sanitary measure empowering the corporations of the larger towns to purchase land by compulsion and build houses where existing accommodation had been declared insanitary. The Bill was opposed by Fawcett and the orthodox Radicals on the ground that it was class legislation. Humanity may censure this attitude, but it was not, as is often assumed, merely pedantic. For unless the State should simultaneously proceed to undertake responsibility for the housing of dukes, a measure to provide accommodation for the working-class created a legal distinction between rich and poor, with the certainty that, though the latter might obtain some immediate benefit, they would sooner or later suffer loss of liberty. Nobody

who reflects on the number of measures since passed for the special protection or oppression of certain classes, and who recognises how far, concurrently with immense extensions of the franchise, we have passed from the conception of the equality of all classes of citizens—the working-man being regarded as a person sometimes to be controlled, sometimes subsidised, sometimes exempted, but never to be given the liberties or responsibilities of people of a higher station—will condemn the arguments of Fawcett and others as puerile. But Disraeli for his part had already answered their objections in *Sybil*. Industrialism having, in his view, actually divided England into two nations, the fact might as well be recognised, the State intervening with laws to soften the asperity of conditions which could be radically altered only by social upheaval.

A Friendly Societies Act, to promote thrift and safeguard the accumulations of the poor, was also actually passed during this session: but the most important outcome of the deliberations of Parliament was the legislation dealing with the relations of employer and employed. Until 1871 a trade union had been held to be an illegal association "in restraint of trade," tolerated indeed, but without a legal right even to proceed against an official who absconded with its funds. In 1871 the Liberals had brought the unions within the law, but rather in the sense of putting them in custody than of admitting them to freedom. A strike became lawful, but "anything done in pursuance of a strike was criminal."¹ While breach of contract by a workman remained a criminal offence, breach of contract by the employer was simply a matter for action in the civil courts.

Both these questions were dealt with by the Government. "Peaceful picketing" was legalised. The theory of a strike as a conspiracy was destroyed by a provision laying down that nothing done in a trade dispute by two or more persons should be regarded

¹ Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*.

as a conspiracy unless it would have been criminal if done by a single individual. Finally, as regarded contracts, employer and employed were placed on an equal footing. Cross was the Minister mainly responsible for the conduct of these measures, but the Cabinet would not have received them but for Disraeli's warm support. He tells Lady Bradford¹ that when Cross explained his scheme "many were against it, and none for it but myself." Not that the average Tory landowner had any objection to discomfiting the manufacturer, but there was a certain fear, explicable by the recent occurrence of an embittered strike among Suffolk labourers, that the concessions might also be used against agricultural employers.

On another subject—that which was the main concern of the Merchant Shipping Act—Disraeli had to be pushed. The object of the measure was to put an end to the scandal of overloaded and over-insured vessels, sent to sea with a cynical disregard to the lives of the men on board. As everybody knows, the matter was decided by the vehemence of Samuel Plimsoll, the Member for Derby, who, denouncing the ship-owners as "ship-knackers" and "villains," shook his fist at the Prime Minister when it appeared that legislation on the subject was to be deferred. Plimsoll, of whom Disraeli wrote that he was "half rogue, half enthusiast," and "a Moody and Sankey in politics," gained more by his indecorum than he would have achieved by the most piercing eloquence. Disraeli's mistake in under-estimating him and his fanaticism is not without significance. In one who had so often declared that men are great through their passions, it was a sign of how far old age had not only frozen his sympathies but dulled his perceptions.

However, the Session of 1875 was certainly the most useful of the Parliament which he dominated, and Liberals should be the last to belittle his essays in social reform because some of them, lacking compulsory clauses, might be taken or left by those whom they

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

concerned. "Permissive legislation," Disraeli said, "is the character of a free people," and no apter motto could be imagined for a text-book of political science written by an orthodox Radical of the Manchester School.

Moreover, though he appeared at the time to be engaged only in domestic problems, it is now known that the Prime Minister was forced to deal with a very grave foreign crisis, which he handled with skill and decision. Bismarck, chagrined at the rapidity with which France had recovered from the blow of 1870, desired to pick a new quarrel in order to avert for ever the danger of a war of restitution.

"Bismarck," wrote Disraeli, "is really another old Bonaparte, and must be bridled."¹ In his old age Disraeli seems to have lost some of the clear vision in European affairs which distinguished him in his youth and prime. For example, he appears to have taken, after the reverse of 1870, the fashionable view of France as a dying nation. We find him talking—perhaps when he was feeling very weak—about the possibility of France being divided by the Great Powers, as Poland had been. But there was this distinction between him and most of the other politicians who had come under the influence of the German professors, and now saw the proof of their theories in the success of the German arms. He may have believed France dying, but he could not think of her as "better dead." He deplored what others thought a capital business. "It is curious," we find him writing to Lady Bradford, "but since the fall of France, who used to give us so much trouble, the conduct of foreign affairs for England has become infinitely more difficult."² In concert with Russia he took steps to foil the new plot, and, fortunately for himself and France, the indiscretion of Bismarck had given him the

¹ Buckle, vol. v.

² Buckle, vol. vi.

warm support of the Queen. Naturally predisposed as she was to the German point of view, she was delighted at an opportunity to snub the Iron Chancellor, who had made himself highly objectionable to her daughter and son-in-law. Nor was her attitude determined solely by trivial motives of this kind. She was inspired by a high though sometimes mistaken patriotism, and had a great sense of her position as Queen of England. Her German connections did not prevent her being, in many respects, more sensitive than the English themselves when any slight was done to the country she represented. She might regard Germany as England's natural partner, but Germany must not be the senior partner, and Bismarck was too obviously working to make her so. With such powerful backing, Disraeli found his task simple. War was averted without difficulty. France was saved. But Bismarck was soon to show how bitterly he resented the derangement of his plans.

Nothing was known to the public at the time of this, perhaps the most useful of all Disraeli's public acts—an act which alone would have justified his displacement of Gladstone, since the latter would undoubtedly have permitted France to be crushed definitively under Germany's heel. A much more measurable feat, however, added enormously to the prestige of the Ministry and the chief Minister. The Khedive of Egypt, financially embarrassed, determined to sell his shares, amounting to nearly a moiety of the whole original holding, in the Suez Canal Company. The news that he was negotiating with a French syndicate reached the Government through two sources. Frederick Greenwood, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, receiving the information from one Oppenheimer, conveyed it to Lord Derby, who, of course, was the last man in England to act on it. Disraeli heard what was afoot from a member of the Rothschild family, and was at once interested.

There were many difficulties in the way. Parliament had risen for the year. Derby was scandalised when the

Prime Minister proposed that the Cabinet should act on its own responsibility, and from this time dated a certain cooling in the almost affectionate relations which had so far subsisted between the old statesman and the son of his former chief. Stafford Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, also expressed the objections of a financial purist, though in the long run he yielded assent. The Queen was enraptured. After the preliminary difficulties had been settled, there remained the question of getting the money. Disraeli, with an optimism born of his early experience in obtaining "temporary accommodation" on much less solid security than the word of a Cabinet, was not to be baulked. Having secured the option, he got in touch with the Rothschilds, and with scarcely a moment's hesitation they advanced him the cash.

When the *coup* was revealed, the plaudits were loud and general. Certain criticisms, however, made themselves heard above the roar of applause. Many who on the whole approved, and who could not condemn the Prime Minister for acting without authorisation from the House of Commons—for delay would have lost the deal—found an unpleasantly Jewish flavour in the methods actually adopted. Why had Disraeli gone to the Rothschilds without first approaching the Bank of England? And was not the interest of 15 per cent. a little usurious?

About the same time Disraeli concluded an agreement with Japan, with the object of bringing combined pressure on China over a small matter then in dispute. The affair is only worth mention as an example of Disraeli's foresight. Japan, he said, was "the Sardinia of the Mongolian East." Probably he was the first statesman in Europe to give more than an amused attention to the newly-emerged Island Empire.

Altogether 1875 was a year of triumph, and Disraeli's spirits reacted to the sunshine of popularity. He showed himself much in society. He dined in the City, sometimes indifferently—witness that famous banquet at which, after passing course after course as not only

badly cooked but cold, he greeted the first glass of champagne with the remark, "Thank Heaven for something really hot at last!" He was even seen occasionally at race meetings. The Ministerial whitebait dinners at Greenwich were positively hilarious. No opposition in the House of Commons, boundless enthusiasm in the country, eternal sunshine at the Court—the aged Minister seemed to have left trouble finally behind him. Lord Hartington (whom Disraeli always called "Harty-tarty") was not the man to keep Ministers awake at nights; he had some difficulty in performing that office for himself. And as for the country and the Queen, Disraeli had recipes for keeping both in good humour.

Mr. Lloyd George, it has been said, made government part and parcel of the art of the cinematograph. Disraeli, who lived in the days of the panorama, exhibited policy in a series of brilliantly coloured pictures. The Suez Canal *coup* was an excellent example of the method. Everything could be seen standing out with stereoscopic emphasis—the Canal itself, still new enough to be an eighth wonder of the world, an Egyptian prince bankrupt through exotic pleasures, stealthy French financiers seeking profit from his necessities, a vigilant Prime Minister forestalling them on mysteriously gathered information, a Jewish man of millions who weighed out from his Aladdin's cave the requisite gold, a Royal lady who beamed approval of the deft stroke. The thing was as exciting as a novel. It was, indeed, a novel; a corrected proof of *Vivian Grey*.

In furtherance of the panorama scheme Disraeli persuaded the Queen to open in person the Session of 1876. It was a fitting prelude to a sitting which was to be peculiarly his and hers. The Prime Minister seems to have himself suggested to the Queen that she ought to be called Empress of India. Possibly he had no other object than to be pleasant; perhaps the whole thing was only a variant of the "tomahawk punch" which Vivian Grey promised to concoct for

the Marquis of Carabas. But Queen Victoria was no Marchioness of Carabas to forget all about such a matter by the next day. An able and conscientious monarch, she was still a woman, with a woman's taste for frippery. What the half-promise of a new hat might have been to one of her humble female subjects, the suggestion of an Imperial diadem was to her. Once the idea had been implanted in the Royal mind, there could be no rest until it had reached the status of legal fact. There were difficulties, however. Precisely the kind of people who were, on general grounds, most favourable to the Throne, and most willing to enlarge its dignity or prerogative, were also precisely the people who in their Conservatism disliked any tinkering with old-established usage. There was, moreover, more than a prejudice against the imperial title. It stood in English minds for one of two things—an autocratic European system or a barbarous Asiatic one, something to be feared, or something to be despised. To the Radical it was a challenge. The Conservative regarded it as something infinitely less venerable than the ancient title of King.

At the best there was bound to be dislike of the change or—what was equally undesirable—ridicule. Matters were made worse by the way in which the Prime Minister sprang his proposal on Parliament. Ordinarily, when legislation affecting the Royal Family is in question, a Prime Minister consults in advance the leaders of the Opposition, in order to secure that debate on a subject so delicate shall be as brief and as little acrimonious as possible. Disraeli, however, approached neither Hartington nor Granville. Probably he was a little shy. There is no reason to believe that he, personally, saw anything ridiculous in the Bill; on the contrary, his whole character would suggest that he firmly believed in its value as a gesture to India and as an appeal to Royalist sentiments in the masses at home. But an old man about to marry a girl of twenty, while fully convinced that he need not fear laughter, does in fact fear it, and generally takes steps to let

nothing of his intentions appear until they have been carried out. Disraeli was in a similar case. He might feel that his scheme was perfectly commonsense. But it by no means followed that he would like to expose his scheme, in the freedom of private conversation, to the downright commentary of a solid person like Hartington. He no doubt expected that the Liberal leaders would be awed by the raptures of the populace when he sprang upon them unawares a definite Parliamentary proposal. The extent of his misapprehension was apparent when the matter reached Parliament. Disraeli found that the alien in him had confused his judgment of one side of the character of the people among whom he had lived for seventy years. He had not stunned the English imagination. He had merely roused that formidable thing, the hostile laughter of a humorous people. It might have gone hard with him had he not been saved by the mistake of an enemy. Lowe, who had most qualities but commonsense and common courtesy, inveighed against the proposal with a vehemence and ill-nature that disregarded all the bounds both of proportion and decency. The Queen, he declared, had asked previous Prime Ministers to make her an Empress, and they had all refused. Only in Disraeli had she found a sufficiently subservient tool. This excess of violence produced its natural result. To refute the charge in detail was easy; Lowe was placed in a position of the utmost humiliation; in the revulsion of feeling the Bill was passed with ease; the title, once established by law, became quickly respectable in the eyes of most, and in a few years was regarded, by the Conservatives at least, as a valuable asset of the Crown. At Christmas Disraeli received from the proud and grateful Queen a card signed "Victoria R. and I." A writer in the *Quarterly Review*,¹ describes the dinner at which the Prime Minister for the first time proposed the health of "the Empress of India," making "a little speech as flowery as the oration of a maharajah," and tells how at its

¹ April, 1901.

conclusion the Queen made him a "pretty smiling bow, half a curtsy."

Meanwhile in the region of foreign affairs there were not wanting signs that the ease which the Prime Minister had chiefly coveted was to be denied him. Russia's growing domination of Central Asia was on the one hand felt as constituting a menace to British interests in the East. On the other hand the condition of Turkey in Europe, following a rising against the Sultan's authority in Herzegovina, was fast becoming a scandal. Some months before the public had begun to take an interest in the question, the Ottoman problem had engaged the attention of Continental Governments, and in December, 1875, Count Andrassy, the Austrian Chancellor, on behalf of Germany and Russia as well as of his own country, drew up a Note to the Porte. This grave document recited Turkey's failure to fulfil her many promises of reform, warned her that unless they were put in effect Serbia and Montenegro might be driven to join hands with the rebels of Herzegovina, and informed her that the signatory Powers were resolved to obtain fulfilment of Turkey's pledges in regard to the treatment of the Christian populations.

In the drafting of this document there had been no consultation with Great Britain, France, or Italy. France was a defeated Power, Italy an upstart Power, England (since 1870) a negligible Power—such seems to have been the reasoning of the statesmen of the three Empires. France and Italy, however, at once acquiesced in the Note. England delayed. Derby disliked any intervention, even in alliance with all Europe, which might mean war; Disraeli objected to England being allotted a subordinate part in any European matter. Eventually concurrence was signified, but the delay had been fatal. The Porte realised that the unanimity of Europe was unreal, and, satisfied that it might regard England as an

abettor and ally, merely emitted the most transparent insincerities.

In May, 1876, the three Continental Empires again took counsel, and produced the "Berlin Memorandum," which warned Turkey that, failing compliance with the demands for reform, force would be used. France and Italy again concurred. This time Great Britain quite definitely refused to associate herself with the policy of the Note, on the double ground that she had not been consulted as to the policy and that she dissented from the policy on its merits. Disraeli had decided to assert himself. Policy apart, he seems to have welcomed the opportunity of a theatrical appearance. He was by now in the mood for adventure. Perhaps he was urged by the Queen to assert himself. Perhaps he remembered how Palmerston had won peace and admiration by taking the chances of war. Perhaps he was merely touched with the frivolity of old age; in a letter to Lady Bradford he had expressed the desire to "expire in a blaze"; and the adulation he enjoyed over the Suez Canal affair may have had some effect. In the early summer of 1876 Derby had seen reason to fear that he was heading for war. There could certainly be no more dangerous combination than that of a timid Foreign Minister and a Prime Minister whose mind moved on the lines of drama. Derby's main idea of policy was to take no step lest he should take a wrong step. But the case was one which did not permit indefinite procrastination. Things were moving rapidly. Owing to England's refusal to subscribe the Berlin Memorandum it was not presented. The situation developed unchecked. Serbia and Montenegro declared war against the Porte. The Bulgarians rose against their Turkish oppressors, and from Bulgaria soon came a tale of horror.

During June there began to appear in the *Daily News* reports of atrocities perpetrated by the Sultan's troops during the suppression of the Bulgar revolt. A member of the newspaper staff, J. R. MacGahan, gave the result of personal investigation in a series of articles,

of which a single quotation, relating to what took place at Batak, will suffice. The correspondent saw there dogs feeding upon a heap which consisted of corpses of two hundred girls who, he was told, had been imprisoned, dishonoured, and finally beheaded. In the ruins of the school were the remains of two hundred women who had been burnt alive within its walls. The churchyard was heaped with dead to the height of three or four feet. The church itself was half filled with charred and putrefying bodies. Of a family of twenty members only a single old woman survived. It was a common incident to find the mutilated remains of children. One woman was seen moaning over three little skulls which lay in her lap.

Englishmen, it should be noted, could not think of these as matters which, however horrible, lay beyond the scope of their concern. For England had been in a very special sense the protector of Turkish dominion in Europe. The Crimean War had been fought to defend the Turkish Empire, and Palmerston's policy had been uniformly Turcophil. Nor was this ancient history; within the last few months England had again appeared, this time in isolation from all the rest of Christendom, as the Turks' champion. The Bulgarian revelations were, therefore, highly embarrassing to the Government. People who would on general principles have approved Derby's policy of non-intervention began to murmur that England must make common cause with the other Powers to end such infamies. Others, who on general principles took the view of Disraeli, who regarded Turkey as a valuable buffer, and who resented the subordinate part allotted to England by the three Empires, were yet horrified to find these barbarities committed virtually under British protection.

Disraeli himself remained apparently unmoved. He seemed, indeed, to think and speak with a sneer. Fastening on the allegations of torture, he remarked that Orientals usually "terminated their connection with culprits in a more expeditious manner." This was commonly interpreted as the expression of a

callous indifference, and, indeed, in anybody else such an idiom would have been assailable on the ground of taste, but Disraeli's diction was often marked by an almost foreign insensibility to the inappropriate, and there is every reason to think that he believed himself to be stating a serious argument in serious terms. He was, at any rate, vastly annoyed when some Members of the House of Commons sniggered at the expression.

Nevertheless his impassivity needs explanation. Even when consular reports began to paint the Bulgarian horrors in colours scarcely less lurid than those employed by the journalist he talked of "coffee-house babble." Mr. MacGahan had said that out of eight or nine thousand people at Batak only twelve or fifteen hundred had been left alive. Mr. Walter Baring, ordered to make an official investigation, reduced the number of victims to five thousand. Gloating over this discrepancy, Disraeli seemed to forget that the murder of five thousand people could not be deemed an inconsiderable affair, and that, if it were to be defended at all, an appeal must be made to quite other than arithmetical arguments.

Had his character been generally callous there would be no mystery. But he was in fact a man of more than ordinary kindliness. Things which had not distressed the otherwise occupied mind of Gladstone, things which had been a positive satisfaction to the interested mind of Bright, had roused in him a passionate sympathy with the oppressed which had found expression in burning words, when he had only words to offer, and, when the opportunity came, in measures of value and sincerity. All his life he had protested against the sweating of children, and his Government had only this very year passed an education measure absolutely prohibiting the employment of boys and girls under the age of ten. Only this very year, also, he had interested himself in legislation to restrict the "horrible practice" of vivisection, in relation to which he shared the deep aversion which Queen Victoria felt for such

experiments. He was, undeniably, not only a good-natured man but a man of much deeper feeling than most—a man who, with all Gladstone's humanitarianism, possessed an experience and imagination which Gladstone lacked. Why, then, did these horrors leave him cold? Why did he think of them as a mere inconvenience? He recognised readily enough that they made it extremely difficult for him to give full support to Turkey, but he never wavered in his desire to give Turkey all the support he could, and he appears to have been absolutely contemptuous of those who used the atrocities as an argument for a change of policy.

Two lines of explanation may be suggested. For his general attitude on the Eastern Question more can now be said than his most fervent supporters then imagined. At the time the Russian peril naturally obsessed all minds. It is now seen that Disraeli was thinking quite as much about the two Central Empires, whose plan it was to isolate Great Britain. Knowing more and seeing further than any English statesman of his time, he was naturally exasperated by the turn of events in Bulgaria, which upset his calculations and complicated his task.

Yet even so it might have been imagined that some sign of his disgust with the work of the Turkish butchers would, if but involuntarily, have escaped him. No such sign was given. All his wrath was reserved for those who suggested that the Turk could no longer be considered the second gentleman in Europe. There was surely more than a spice of truth in Gladstone's remark to Argyll that this belittlement of the atrocities was due to "Dizzy's crypto-Judaism." Dimly, and, it may be, unconsciously, the Prime Minister was feeling the influence of his blood. The secular sympathy of Jew for Moslem was roused in him, and with it went the Jew's hatred for the Christians of the East. Disraeli might interest himself, as an English landlord, in the services of Hughenden, and assert his right to a manorial seat which an innovating High Church vicar would have abolished. But when the East swam before

him he was pure Jew ; and now, while the massacre of Christians awoke in many Englishmen some spark of the old spirit which had sent Cœur de Lion to Joppa, he found himself suddenly an alien, and even in a sense an enemy alien. It is possible to justify his policy in terms of British interest. His callousness was a private matter. The cynicism alternating with explosions of temper marked genuine bewilderment and pained anger. Once before, at the time of the Indian Mutiny, he had felt this aloofness from the people among whom he lived, and for whom he worked. Then his isolation was ennobled by the part his racial separation enabled him to play. Now, appearing as the apologist of the desolator of Bulgaria, he was seen to less advantage. But the man's mind had remained constant ; it was only circumstances which had changed.

During the Session of 1876 there was little debate on these questions. Granville and Hartington, the responsible leaders of the Opposition, were fully imbued with the respectable tradition that a Government must not be embarrassed in questions of foreign policy. Thus on the whole the agitation of the country found little reflection in the House of Commons. On August 11 Disraeli, in reply to Harcourt, made a somewhat fuller statement of his intentions than he had so far vouchsafed. "Our duty at this critical moment," he said, "is to maintain the Empire of England," but he allowed it to be understood that the Empire of Turkey must be maintained with it. He admitted that twelve thousand Bulgarians had been murdered. But, he added, there was "nothing to justify us in talking in such a vein of Turkey as has been, and is being, at this time entertained."

They were the last words he was to speak as a Member of the House of Commons. Immediately after he had made the announcement he rose from his seat, took a long glance round the House, and disappeared behind the Speaker's chair. The next day it was announced that he had been created Earl of Beaconsfield. The double labour of Prime Minister and leader

of the House of Commons was beyond his strength at a time which he, better than most men, realised to be critical. He was too much interested in the situation to have any serious thought of retiring, though the thought of resignation did once enter his mind, only to be ousted by the energetic remonstrance of the Queen. But to play his part in the time before him he must conserve his energies, and only in the House of Lords could he divest himself of the cares of controlling Parliament. It is said that on the last day his eyes filled with tears. He had never loved or respected the House of Commons as other men had done, yet it had been so much of his life that he could not leave it unaffected. So much of the best part of him had been buried there that he might almost feel as if he were at his own graveside.

The next month,¹ Gladstone published his famous pamphlet on the Bulgarian horrors, and the Christian Party had a leader. Disraeli was at first little moved, dismissing Gladstone as a reckless bigot, under the influence of "envy, vindictiveness, hypocrisy and superstition."² But when it became impossible to ignore the effect of Gladstone's writing Disraeli adopted a new line; the Gladstonian policy, he declared, would mean a European war. In this contention there was probably more truth than was generally allowed. It has been argued that, since Russia, Germany, and Austria were already acting in concert, and France and Italy had expressed acquiescence, no war could have followed drastic action against Turkey. England, it seemed, had only to join the other Powers in putting pressure on the Porte in order to secure not only the safety of the Christian populations but also international peace. Doubt, however, is permissible. The unity of purpose between the three Empires was illusory. Russia may have been, as Argyll and others believed, genuinely anxious to co-operate with England in the Balkans on behalf of the Christian peoples, but

¹ September, 1876.

² Buckle, vol. vi—speaking to Lord Derby.

Beaconsfield himself was convinced that the main peril of an outbreak of general hostilities did not reside with Russia. Bismarck was, as Disraeli saw, the most dangerous person in Europe; and Bismarck wanted war—war of almost any sort. He was extremely willing that England and Russia should be embroiled, standing as he did to gain by the weakness of either, or both. But if England should take common action with Russia, then, by inducing Austria to consider her interests imperilled, he might start a conflagration which would so weaken all the chief Powers as to leave Germany a multitude of opportunities. There was Poland to be snatched from Russia; there was the final crushing of France to be accomplished; there was Belgium to be over-run, and Holland to be overawed if England were sufficiently bleed not to be able to forbid the presence of a Great Power at the mouths of the Meuse and the Scheldt.

That Beaconsfield had a firmer grasp of all this side of the situation than any other English statesman is probable, but his real opinions on the German danger can only be gathered from his official and intimate correspondence. In his speeches Germany is never even mentioned. Consequently, to those among his contemporaries who were adverse to him he seemed very much the hypocrite when he spoke of himself as the preserver of peace, and condemned Gladstone as a war-monger. Neither could he give tangible evidence for the profession, nor for the accusation could he offer substantial justification. To-day his sincerity is, in a measure at least, revealed. For, while he was not working for peace in the absolute sense of Derby, he did with might and main, with every resource of his agile and subtle intellect, with all the energy that was left to an old and ageing man, with all the wile that had been cultivated in the life-long battle of wits, waged against every manner of adversary from the duke to the moneylender, work to save his country from involvement in such a war as that in which Bismarck aimed to reap the wrecker's profit.

CHAPTER XVI

ON the first day of November, 1876, Disraeli was at the theatre, seeing Mrs. Kendal in a play called *Peril*. The title at least was apposite to the situation, for on the day before Russia had despatched to Turkey an ultimatum. However, the immediate danger passed. The Sultan lost no time in complying with the Russian demand, and shortly afterwards the British Government proposed a conference of the Powers at Constantinople.

In view of subsequent events it is no less curious than necessary to note that up to this time the Government had been blamed chiefly for its inactivity. John Bright, representing the party which favoured strict neutrality, had gone out of his way to acquit it of provocation, but the passivity which he praised was exactly the Government's crime in the eyes of Gladstone and his followers. The Gladstonian group was strictly an *ad hoc* party. The official Liberal leaders held aloof from it; the Manchester Radicals were not of it. It was in fact an essentially religious party, a coalition of the two most vital spiritual forces in the country, the High Churchmen and the Nonconformists. Its ramifications extended even to the Cabinet, for Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, was one of its members, and Salisbury himself was at least influenced by it for a period.

From first to last, on the other hand, all the forces of finance were ranged on the side of the Prime Minister. The City of London, famous for its comprehending generosity, refused, much to Beaconsfield's glee, to subscribe to a fund for the relief of the Bulgarians. Here, again, the lines of party demarcation were crossed.

Despite a professed difference in politics, Beaconsfield had the Rothschilds at his back. Goschen, a rising hope of the Liberals, was warm in his support, and the *Daily Telegraph*, founded as a Liberal organ, went over decisively to the Conservative side. Mr. Winston Churchill, in his biography of Lord Randolph, wrote that "the powers of fashion and clubland" delighted in Beaconsfield, having "never before found a leader so much to their temper." But this rally to the sign of the Crescent marked a later stage of the Near Eastern controversy. The City gave the lead; "fashion and clubland" followed, at first a little dubiously. It was almost the first time that Beaumanoir humbly followed the initiative of Change Alley.

Mammon having declared on his side, Disraeli cared little for the fury of the saints. He had never been alarmed by Gladstone's pamphlet, and when he spoke at the Lord Mayor's banquet, it was with perfect assurance that he declared his attitude:

There is no country so interested in the maintenance of peace as England. Peace is especially an English policy. She is not an aggressive Power, for there is nothing which she desires. She covets no cities and no provinces. . . . But although the policy of England is peace, there is no country so well prepared for war as our own. If she enters into conflict in a righteous cause—and I will not believe that England will go to war except for a righteous cause—if the contest is one which concerns her liberty, her independence, or her Empire, her resources, I feel, are inexhaustible. She is not a country that, when she enters into a campaign, has to ask herself whether she can support a second or a third campaign. She enters into a campaign which she will not terminate till right is done.

One feature of this declaration was demonstrably insincere, for it is now certain that the Prime Minister already contemplated such changes in the map as would provide another brilliant set of scenes for his panorama. He had talked to Derby about the possibility of neutralising "Constantinople with an adequate district" and making it a "free port, in the custody and under the

guardianship of England.”¹ Perhaps even his subtle brain could not overcome the difficulty of reconciling custody and freedom, but no sooner was this project abandoned than he began to dream of placing Varna under the British flag; and, like Mr. Lloyd George over forty years later, he revelled for some space in visions of an extended Greece, subservient to British influence.

Though the speech was read as a challenge to Russia, Beaconsfield was far from any intention of forcing that country to take up arms. He did not, in fact, believe that Russia needed more than words; there was more contempt than hatred in his attitude to that Power; the Colossus which had so long awed Europe did not appal the Jew, who had some instinct for its rottenness. His main consideration, now and hereafter, was Germany. He wanted to let Bismarck know that England, while ready, if necessary, to fight for her own hand, was resolved not to play any game of his.

In this speech Beaconsfield announced that Salisbury would represent England at the Constantinople Conference. The appointment was a clever stroke of policy. It went far to disarm critics at home, for Salisbury, a High Churchman, was genuinely anxious to secure the Eastern Christians, and passed for being more pro-Russian than pro-Turk; it was a guarantee of circumspection, since it was a cardinal principle of policy with Salisbury that a cordial understanding must be maintained with Austria; further, as the Minister who had twice been in charge of Indian affairs, Salisbury could only be presumed to possess, despite his Anglicanism, a due sense of the importance of regarding Moslem susceptibilities.

Probably Beaconsfield expected no successful issue to the Conference. But it represented a gain of time, and time he wanted for many reasons. Military and naval force had to be prepared for the support of diplomacy; and in regard to the alternative plans he had formed delay was desirable for the one and necessary for the other. Either agreement must be

¹ Buckle, vol. vi.

reached with Germany, or a real settlement must be postponed until France had so far recovered from her defeats as to be able to take her place as England's chief Continental ally. In the ensuing months Beaconsfield swayed from one plan to the other, while always keeping both in sight. It was in vain that Bismarck sought to commit him by pressing on him the occupation of Egypt, which, of course, would have definitely alienated the French. That net was spread in vain in the sight of a very wary old bird. More and more convinced that Bismarck desired to promote some sort of war against an isolated England, he watched the Chancellor with a cool and good-humoured detachment in which there was much respect, but not a particle of awe. Before the long crisis was over Bismarck had to declare that "the old Jew was the big man." His age was against him. But he was at least as dexterous as the Pomeranian; he possessed more self-control; and—the greatest advantage of all—he was, as a Jew, comparatively without prejudice. To the very end he played his balancing game without committing himself. Ultimately the closer understanding was formed with Germany, but not until all Bismarck's schemes to British detriment had been foiled one by one.

Time was wanted, also, at home. When Beaconsfield attempted to think in English terms he often made gross mistakes. When he looked on England through the eyes of the intelligent foreigner he often saw a great deal that was hidden to Englishmen themselves. At this moment he was very decidedly the intelligent foreigner, and the fact gave increased keenness to his perception of certain values, though it rendered him altogether oblivious to others. Thus he recognised that, while the English are of all peoples in the world (except possibly the Americans) the most subject to violent fits of sentiment, they are also singular in feeling a definite dread of sentiment. For the sake of simplicity let us imagine an extravagant case. Many Englishmen would be extremely shocked

if the Prime Minister of the day set out to deride the Sermon on the Mount. But he would probably continue Prime Minister. But if the Prime Minister announced, in sufficiently precise detail, that he proposed to regulate his political conduct by the Sermon on the Mount, he would undoubtedly be swept from office by one convulsive movement of all the respectable classes. We will apply this parable to the circumstances of 1876. Disraeli was at first in the position of our blasphemous statesman, reprimanded but not dismissed; Gladstone was finally in the position of our pious statesman, swept aside as an absurd and dangerous impossibilist. A great many people enjoyed reading about the Bulgarians; a smaller number enjoyed sending small cheques to the Bulgarian Relief Fund; it was an enjoyment much like that which admirers of the worse Dickens (then assumed the better) felt in reading the death of Little Nell. But when the definite question had to be answered—Shall we go to war with Turkey on behalf of the Bulgarians or shall we not?—the dread of sentiment began immediately to operate. At a great meeting in London addressed by Gladstone, Freeman, the historian, exclaimed, "Perish the interests of England, perish our dominion in India, rather than we should strike one blow or speak one word on behalf of the wrong against the right." While that sentiment could be applauded by a great body of people Beaconsfield recognised that neither war for Turkey nor strong diplomatic action on Turkey's behalf was for the moment possible. But he also saw that reaction was inevitable, and that it would probably be swift.

The Queen was in this matter, as in some others, only a little way ahead of her middle-class subjects. In many ways she was very decidedly a sentimentalist; but she also represented, in an extreme degree, the British dread of sentiment. She soon enraged herself over the "mawkish" conduct of the Gladstonians, and in this view she was presently joined by the majority of her subjects.

At the beginning of 1877 Beaconsfield, suffering from gout, asthma, and bronchitis, and naturally in no sweet temper, was blaming Salisbury, who seemed "not to be aware that his principal object in being sent to Constantinople is to keep the Russians out of Turkey and not to create ideal conditions for the Turkish Christians."¹ It was not, however, in any way Salisbury's fault that the Conference broke up in failure. Bismarck was intent on producing a war, while the Turks, relying on England, were even more anxious to break the peace. "In spite of all the declarations of the English Cabinet," Midhat Pasha wrote a little later, "it appeared to us to be absolutely impossible for her (England) to avoid interfering sooner or later in this Eastern dispute." In these words, Beaconsfield's policy, wise in some respects, has its true condemnation. So long as he acted as an English Minister, thinking only of Europe, he fully earned the gratitude of his country, which owed him more than any man of his generation for defeating the designs of Bismarck. But on the special question of the Near East he was a Jew inspired by Semitic prejudice, and his weakness was the weakness of his policy. His statesmanship saved the worst evils of his partiality. But his partiality precipitated evils which might have been avoided.

In April Russia declared war. In view of the divided opinion in England there was no course but neutrality, yet it was hard to make the neutrality genuine and absolute. It was not the ordinary case of a war party and a peace party. There were two war parties—pro-Turkish and pro-Russian; both were represented in the Cabinet itself, and the fiercest member of one sat on the Throne. Queen Victoria's disapproval of the Gladstonians was unmeasured. She wanted the Attorney-General set at Gladstone and others for venturing merely to express condemnation of the Turks. Now, when war was declared, she expressed herself furiously against those who desired England to join Russia in what the *Spectator* described as the

¹ Buckle, vol. vi.

justest and most necessary war of the age. Beaconsfield, who himself recognised the impossibility of going to war as Turkey's ally, was unable to make her understand the necessity for caution. Her "blood boiled," and she could not see why it should not boil over. "If," she wrote to her Prime Minister, "England is to kiss Russia's feet, she (the Queen) would not be a party to the humiliation of England, and would lay down her crown."¹ It seemed shocking to her that Carnarvon and others should take the Russian side on religious grounds. "It is natural," she wrote, "that everyone should have their own opinion, especially on religion, but when the policy of Great Britain comes into consideration . . . *all* private feelings should be over-ruled."¹ When Derby and Salisbury seemed to stand in the way of more vigorous policy, the Queen would have had both of them resign. In June she threatened for the second time to abdicate, and Disraeli was for ever urged to greater boldness. The idea of a rival atrocity campaign, directed against the Cossacks, appealed strongly to her. "The Queen must say she can't stand it," was her terse comment on the pacific methods of the Foreign Office.¹ And at last, in the culminating note of rage, she wrote, "Oh, if the Queen were a man, she would like to go and give these Russians, whose word one cannot believe, such a beating."¹

Beaconsfield, putting up as best he might with this running shriek of pugnacity, pursued his policy, which was to obtain pledges for the security of British interests. The integrity of the Turkish capital being held to be a British interest, it was obvious that Russia's military leaders must find our neutrality exceedingly troublesome, and preparation had to be made to inflame British minds to the war point if, after all, war should come. To this end a diplomatic change was necessary. Sir Henry Layard was sent out to Constantinople in place of Sir Henry Elliott, who, though a strong Turcophil, had made damaging admissions. Layard,

¹ Buckle, vol. vi.

an old Palmerstonian, carried to the point of genius a talent for believing what he found convenient to believe; he had even believed in the existence of a Spanish Protestant party. This faculty was, no doubt, his main qualification for his new employment. England had to be given a better idea of Turkey before any really firm stand could be made on her behalf.

Meanwhile a cautious official Opposition refused countenance to Gladstone's militancy. From Parliament the Government had little to fear. Its real trouble was the division in the ranks of Ministers themselves. Derby, who had strongly supported Beaconsfield against those who desired war on behalf of the Balkan Christians, was equally emphatic against any suggestion of intervention on the other side. Carnarvon actually wanted Russia to take and hold Constantinople for Christendom. Salisbury would have let the Russians take Constantinople on a pledge of evacuation after the signing of peace. Cross, Cairns, and others were for peace, provided Russia agreed not to occupy Constantinople. Hardy, Manners, and a new Minister, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, favoured immediate support of Turkey, and formed the Queen's party in the Ministry. Beaconsfield himself was more circumspect. He wished rather to use the threat of war than actually to make war. A certain fineness of mind told him that war was in itself a confession of failure, and he hoped to gain more by keeping the nation's powder dry than by burning it.

During the first weeks of the Russian advance he was called on to perform daily miracles of tact and management in resisting the Queen's pressure and keeping his Cabinet together. His wisdom and skill had their reward. In July his difficulties were sensibly relieved by the Turkish stand at Plevna. The Turk, ravishing, burning, and disembowelling, had unfavourably affected one side of English sensibility; the Turk at bay, a dogged hero after the heart of our own people, appealed to another. Moreover, argument, or rather reiterated affirmation, had produced its effect. The

British people, not for the first time or the last time, were persuaded that Constantinople was the strategic centre of the world and the key to all Empire, and were even led to believe that it would be a simple matter for the Czar's forces, once on the banks of the Bosphorus, to march thence through Syria on the Suez Canal. That the Prime Minister himself actually credited the latter possibility, and even regarded it as a pressing danger, is not impossible. His notion of war was a civilian's, and invasion of Asiatic Russia through Armenia was one of the tentative projects which he put before the Cabinet during this year. But whether or not he himself were really perturbed for the safety of the British Empire, the Queen grew more and more warlike. Nowhere could he escape her telegrams, and her letters were of such bellicose vehemence as sometimes to suggest to him resignation—or at least the threat of it—as the only exit from his worries.

With the fall of Plevna in the second week of December the respite was at an end. Beaconsfield, feeling that something decisive, or at least impressive, must be done, was for meeting Parliament with a proposal to mediate, and a demand for large additions to the fighting forces. The Cabinet, however, was still hopelessly divided, and only a threat of his own resignation could bring Ministers temporarily into line. Derby decided to go some steps further along the road of danger. Salisbury, conscious that his career could not afford the shock of two secessions, proved amenable, in spite of his serious fear of Beaconsfield's policy. "I have triumphed," Beaconsfield wrote to Lady Bradford on December 19. "On Monday night there was virtually no Government, but on Tuesday the recusants fell upon their knees and surrendered at discretion." Carnarvon alone remained recalcitrant, and talked to a Colonial deputation about "lashing ourselves into a nervous apprehension for so-called British honour and British interests."

The situation, however, remained tense, and Beaconsfield, when Parliament opened, spoke in a way that

testified to his embarrassments. Trade was bad. Revenue was declining. It was clear that the forward policy for which the Queen was pressing would be extraordinarily unpopular in those industrial districts which, largely under the Stanley influence, had shown Conservative majorities at the last election. If Derby feared Disraeli's resignation, Disraeli feared Derby's scarcely less. It would have been pleasant, in his capacity of Court favourite, to gratify Her Majesty and approve himself the paladin of her dreams. It would have been equally pleasant, in his capacity of Jew, to support Turkey by arms as well as by diplomacy. But in his capacity as Party politician he saw that caution was a sheer necessity, and to his higher vision as statesman the general aspect of affairs on the Continent was still unpropitious for decisive action. Though Beaconsfield often failed to appreciate military problems, he had the true instinct for a diplomatic situation. He sometimes forgot that an army fought on its stomach. He always remembered that the task of diplomacy is to save blood by using brains, and the prospect of facing the Russians, with the beaten Turk as sole ally, gave him pause.

An alliance with Austria was in prospect when, at the end of January, orders were given to the fleet to enter the Dardanelles. Derby and Carnarvon, to the Queen's immense relief, at once resigned, but within twenty-four hours the orders were countermanded, and Derby returned to the Cabinet. The cause of this hasty change of plans still remains something of a mystery. The ships were in the first place ordered to move because a Russian occupation of Constantinople was expected immediately. Then Layard telegraphed that an armistice was signed, and the countermanding order was given. So far all is simple. But immediately afterwards a second message was received from the Ambassador, announcing that, despite the armistice, the Russians were still advancing. Of this communication no notice was taken. Would the fleet have been again instructed to move had Derby proved more pliant

in the first instance, or had he possessed less influence in Lancashire? Carnarvon, Churchman and idealist, Beaconsfield made no effort to retain. Cotton counted for much more than clericalism.

But by this time the public had taken a hand. The Jingo fever had laid hold of London and that part of England which takes its tone from London; the enthusiasm of the capital caused Lancashire to recede a little into the background; and the general atmosphere encouraged the Prime Minister to greater daring. When the fleet was again ordered to move, only a fortnight after Carnarvon's resignation, Salisbury was ready to go all lengths, and Derby professed agreement with the declaration of his chief that the Turco-Russian peace terms must be submitted to the judgment of Europe.

Meanwhile, though Derby doubtless hoped to be a drag on the wheel, Beaconsfield had become virtually his own Foreign Minister. A hundred brilliant ideas were flashing through his brain. This day he would take Crete, that day he would take Batoum, or Acre, or Mytilene as the price of a loan to Turkey. Something far more splendid than the Suez Canal *coup* must stand to his credit. He felt himself strong. France, partly to reassert herself in Europe, partly because of the influence of the Anglophil Gambetta, favoured the British proposal for a conference. His fear of Bismarck was passing. Russia, despite her victory, was exhausted; and the Pomeranian had begun secretly, though not so secretly as to leave Disraeli uninformed, to urge a rather hesitant Austria to support the English. All this was a contrast to the position of England when she had been ignored in the preparation of the Berlin Memorandum. Beaconsfield was largely to blame for the war, since his encouragement stiffened Turkey, and for the bolstering up of the rotten fabric of Ottoman Power a later generation owed him no thanks. But in one way his achievement had been great. He found England despised and disregarded as the sequel to her failure to assert

herself in the matter of Denmark and in the Franco-German peace terms ; he had in a few months made the whole world think of British goodwill as something to be valued and diligently cultivated. During months when he himself knew war to be impossible, he had by clever bluff given the world to believe that he was only holding an impatient and formidable England in leash.

At the beginning of March, 1878, Turkey, under duress, signed the Treaty of San Stefano. Its terms were in many ways moderate. The indemnity was small. Russia obtained at Turkey's expense no territory in Europe. But the creation of a large Bulgaria, to be occupied for two years by Russian garrisons, displeased the Turcophiles, and certain provisions affected the Treaty of Paris, to which Britain, Austria, and Italy had been parties. Beaconsfield, representing the Treaty as outrageous, declaring that it completely abrogated what was known as Turkey in Europe and placed the Sultan in a state of "absolute subjugation to Russia," insisting that the new Bulgaria would be a mere appanage of the Czar, laboured with care to create the impression of a desperate situation. The public fell to his manipulations. Believing that gains under the Treaty would be immense, it naturally concluded that they were worth fighting for on the one side, and worth fighting against on the other. Beaconsfield, of course, knew better. He understood well enough that while Turkey stood to lose much in Europe by many clauses in the Treaty, Russia stood to gain very little. For such arrangements as "Greater Bulgaria" the Czar's Government might be expected to contest diplomatically, as a matter of *amour propre*, but not to fight. In fact, Beaconsfield saw in the Treaty the assurance of his triumph. What Russia really gained by the Treaty, Batoum and Bessarabia (the latter at the expense of Rumania) he would let her retain. On other points she would, he was assured, give way after just such a degree of resistance as would make his victory seem more resplendent.

The military preparations which followed were, of course, necessary to the success of the scheme. They cost the Prime Minister his Foreign Minister, for concurrently with the news that the Cabinet had decided to call out the reserves Lord Derby resigned, this time definitively. Derby had finally broken with Beaconsfield when he found that his chief, while ostensibly making a stand for the integrity of the Ottoman dominions, had resolved on appropriating oddments of Ottoman territory. Nothing in the career of the sober and scrupulous Stanley was more to his credit than this interruption of it. Nothing in the life of the fascinating and unscrupulous Disraeli was more charming than his gesture when the resignation had taken effect. Three days afterwards he offered Derby the Garter. "I always intended it for you," he wrote, "but there were difficulties in my way. I hope you will now accept it, in memory of our long friendship, if of nothing else." Later, as a politician, he was to goad Derby to exasperation by his gibes, but the offer suggests a personal absence of meanness rare in political history.

Parliament rose for a rather long Easter recess with the assurance that nothing had occurred for some time to cause immediate anxiety. On the next day it was announced through the newspapers that seven thousand Indian troops were to be sent to Malta. This move, to which the Cabinet had given its assent some while before, was a complete surprise to the country, and it can well be understood that Beaconsfield did not wish it to be discussed by Parliament until it was an accomplished fact. Gladstone declared it unconstitutional, Selborne illegal. To the politicians of that day the theory of the British Constitution was familiar, and the old jealousy of the Crown still lived. To many the importation of soldiers from India was an act reminiscent of James II's importation of Irish soldiers. Nobody's imagination went so far, of course,

as to envisage vast hordes of turbaned soldiers landing at Southampton to extinguish English liberties and endow Queen Victoria with absolute power. But there was enough left of the ancient spirit to resent any irregularity in the vital matter of authority over the armed forces of the Crown, and the Prime Minister no doubt preferred to defer debate until the public, which liked his panorama and cared very little for constitutional nicety, had declared itself on his side. He was justified in his anticipation that the act would be popular. The English proletarian has always been flattered and impressed by the manipulation of dark troops; perhaps he regards it as a symbol of his own majesty—the billycock giving orders to the turban. Seven thousand sepoys in a European war would not count for much, but they made a brave show, and they were, no doubt, of value as an advertisement of Great Britain's resources. To Beaconsfield they were certainly worth more than the equivalent of English bayonets. They were an illustration of the Oriental theory he had elaborated in *Tancred*. "The intellectual colony of Arabia, once called Christendom," was being reminded that the world's centre of gravity might again have to be sought in the East.

The Indians began to land at Malta on the birthday of the Queen-Empress. It was a suitable return for all the primroses she had sent to him in the spring of the year—those "ambassadors of spring," as he called them, those "gems and jewels of nature," that "offering from the Fauns and Dryads of Osborne," "more precious than rubies" to the Prime Minister, because gathered by the hands of "a sovereign whom he adores."

CHAPTER XVII

IF we study the debates and articles of the 'seventies—it is a weary task—we shall be struck by the unanimity with which Beaconsfield's critics condemn his wisest and most adroit stroke of policy. Even his eulogists are a little shamefaced over that arrangement, long notorious as the Schouvaloff Treaty, which made the Berlin Conference merely a splendid stage scene. They are thrilled with the high gestures, the fine *coups du théâtre*, the despatch of the Indian troops, and the calling out of the reserves; they are a little chilled by glimpses they get of the cool commerce behind the scenes. Yet, unless we insist on this side, even to the belittlement of the more theatrical element, we lose most of the quality which entitles Beaconsfield to be recognised as a true statesman, if in this matter an unduly reckless one. Judged by his public acts alone he might be set down as a prancing mountebank enjoying unmerited luck; it is only when we leave the lime-lit circle that we begin to understand how cleverly a dangerous gamble was made good.

Salisbury's first act as Derby's successor at the Foreign Office was to issue a circular declaring that England could not accept the Treaty of San Stefano, laying down that all the Powers must be consulted, but intimating also that the *status quo ante bellum* could not be restored. Gortchakoff, for Russia, replied in firm but courteous language; and the matter was then left to be thrashed out between the British Foreign Secretary and Schouvaloff, the Russian Ambassador in London. It was essential to arrive at an understanding before the Powers met. In any conference the only chance of success resides in such preliminary agreement, but in this case, with the adroit and malevolent

Bismarck watching his opportunity to provoke a war by which Germany would benefit, it was especially necessary that the differences should be narrowed down by secret interchanges of view. Disraeli was blamed at the time, and has been attacked since, for the "scandal" of the Schouvaloff negotiations. He would, in fact, have merited impeachment had he exposed his country, without such precaution, to the hazard of a Congress. What he did was simply to let Russia know on what points he was going to insist. Stated in general terms, they were simple enough; the "Great Bulgaria" scheme must be modified, and if the Russians insisted on retaining their conquests in Asia, Great Britain must have compensation in some island or station on the coast of Asia Minor. The perfect success of the plan testified to the cunning which inspired it. Russia was asked to yield exactly what she could most cheaply relinquish; she was permitted to retain what she most valued. On the other hand, England gained what Disraeli chiefly wanted—advertisement. Her unspectacular concessions were of great value; in return she was allowed to figure as the successful dictator of terms in a theatre the least important to Russia but the most impressive in the eyes of Europe.

Bismarck's chances of mischief were gone when agreement was reached on the main points, and, recognising his defeat, he made the best of the fact, and definitely proposed that Berlin should be the scene of the Congress which was to settle these large matters, or rather to register the decisions made in London. Beaconsfield had mastered him, and he realised the fact. He had failed to estrange France and Britain, and, to ensure against the clearly reviving strength of France the conquests made in 1870, he must now seek a friendly understanding with London. He therefore decided on the rôle of "honest broker." Unfortunately for Beaconsfield, by the treachery of a clerk and the enterprise of a newspaper, the agreement with Schouvaloff was printed before the Berlin Congress met, and the dramatic effect of that gathering accord-

ingly suffered. Though he had taken such precautions, however, Beaconsfield, still suspicious of Bismarck, and mindful of the possibility of an eleventh-hour treason, left nothing to chance. Reaching Berlin late in the evening, he went straight to the Chancellor. The two talked and smoked. Disraeli, choking with asthma, managed by a miracle of will-power to make something of a German porcelain pipe, and still retain breath enough to make plain his case. Bismarck's reply was no less to the point, and in a quarter of an hour the pair had agreed on all essentials. The Pomeranian was convinced that the "old Jew" meant business. The rest of the Congress was really an affair for the gallery—the sonorous speeches and splendid banquets, the "golden coats and glittering stars," even the special train ostentatiously ordered by the English Prime Minister to take him home should the Russians remain obdurate on a point which they had no real intention of making a *casus belli*. Disraeli's pronunciation of *casus belli* in the English way made, by the way, an enormous and solemn impression among the Continental diplomatists—when it was at length understood. His Latin was more English than his English.

The Treaty of Berlin was signed on July 13, 1878. The chief difference between it and the Treaty of San Stefano concerned Bulgaria. The "Great Bulgaria" scheme was scrapped, and Bulgaria was divided into three parts. The first, to be called Bulgaria, was given actual independence under nominal Turkish suzerainty. The second, variously called Southern Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, was restored to the Sultan under a Christian governor. Seven years later, with the full approval of Great Britain, the two provinces were united. The third part, providing the window to the Ægean Sea, remained Turkish until well into the twentieth century, when the Turks were driven from it by the Balkan allies. Beaconsfield's chief triumph was, therefore, not enduring. What he could do he did for his Turkish friends, but even he could not do

much. His patronage had led them into war, but could not avail to save them the consequences of defeat.

Most English writers, even the least friendly, agree in representing Beaconsfield as the chief figure at the Congress. Foreign observers were less impressed. M. Gabriel Hanotaux, in the *Révue des Deux Mondes*, 1908, speaks of the German Chancellor as occupying a position of indisputable predominance, and of the two English Ministers as deferring to him. The judgments, however, are not irreconcilable. Bismarck, with his "military brusqueness," was no doubt outwardly the strong man. Beaconsfield, eternally the Jew, might well be content to be the power behind the throne. Yet, though he might play second fiddle in public, he was, according to Madame Waddington, "slightly arrogant"; and he could not resist the pleasure of baiting the Russians. When the problem of Bessarabia arose he gave full play to his irony. Russia, who had gone to war for Christendom, was now despoiling her Rumanian allies. Gortchakoff, an old-fashioned diplomatist who loved to embower unpleasant truths in the rose-leaves of fine phraseology, could not endure the cruelty of his tongue.

But a retort might well have been made. For if Russia treated the Rumanians scurvily Britain behaved little better to the Greeks, who had been encouraged to hope much, or to the Turks, who had a strong claim on Beaconsfield to see them through their difficulties. In one important respect the Treaty was, from the Turkish point of view, an aggravation of that of San Stefano. Bosnia and Herzegovina were handed over from Turkish to Austrian control. It was the price paid to Bismarck for his honest brokerage. He desired Austria to become more and more Slav, in order to deprive her of any claim to dispute Prussia's title to the headship of the German body. Beaconsfield seems to have consented without demur to this calamitous arrangement which, forty years later, was to involve Europe in frightful disaster.

Whilst at Berlin he was so tortured with gout that he was sometimes prevented from writing to the Queen. It was from a particularly bad attack that he rose to sign the Treaty, and that duty done, he left as quietly as possible for London. London, however, declined to receive him quietly. The Lord Mayor met him at Charing Cross Station, converted for the occasion into a bower of palms and orange trees. As the train approached the whole station "woke up with demonstrative life. . . . Every eye searched for *him*. Men started up, hat in hand, and pushed their way, . . . anxious for a near view of the noble Earl, and hoping, perhaps, to grasp his hand." The *Daily Telegraph* adds that "even ladies came forward with a like object," but with true Victorian carefulness explains that they were "under escort."

From a Downing Street window, fresh from the congratulatory embrace of Sir Moses Montefiore, the doyen of Jewry in England, Beaconsfield declared that he had brought "Peace with Honour." The peace proved itself a most prolific mother of wars, including the greatest war in history. The honour depends on the point of view. It would not be easy to maintain that England's part in these transactions augmented her reputation for plain dealing. Turkey, encouraged to fight, had been abandoned in her failure. Greece, coaxed not to fight, was defrauded at the peace-making. Russia could complain of secret deals with Bismarck; Bismarck could complain of secret deals with Russia. All the little peoples of the Balkans had been taught to distrust the Powers, of which England had shown herself one of the greatest. Nor was there great material benefit to offset moral detriment. England gained Cyprus, a rather unhealthy island, utterly useless and involving a certain expenditure. "The English want Cyprus," wrote Disraeli in *Tancred*. Few among them had the smallest thought of Cyprus before the Earl of Beaconsfield told them they ought to want it. Then, indeed, it was received in the way such things are received. There was the usual vague idea that the

Indian possessions of the British Crown were being re-insured. There was the usual vague idea that Cyprus was an added buttress to the fabric of the Empire, instead of another package, though a small one, flung across the back of that patient ass the British taxpayer. The gain of Cyprus was celebrated in the usual British manner. The Bible Society held a special committee meeting. In most provincial towns a new slum was called Cyprus. Numberless primary school pupils had to copy the word with the imperfectly understood accompaniment, "ceded to Great Britain, 1878." And there the matter ended.

Why, then, was Beaconsfield in 1878 undoubtedly the most popular man in England, and why was it that Gladstone, his one open enemy, scarcely dared show himself in the London streets? The answer is simple. In whatever else Beaconsfield had failed, he had stirred the national spirit and raised that curious thing called British prestige. Writing of the scenes on his return, M. Hanotaux says :

Ce fut, en effet, un grand jour pour ce peuple qui vit resplendir, sur le ciel déchiré de l'Europe, l'astre Britannique à son apogée.

Disraeli had always grasped one profound truth, that a people is great through its passions rather than its reason. England had every material reason for satisfaction under Gladstone, but while she felt rich she also felt rather mean, and conscious of being meanly regarded. She now felt herself, and knew that she was felt, great among the peoples. It is true that Beaconsfield had hardly restored the position she had held, though on a most precarious tenure, in the days of Palmerston. In the first place England was no longer England, but the British Empire, which made a difference. Secondly, high as the English star might seem, everybody in Europe was conscious of a rival brilliance with perhaps tougher substance behind it. No part of Germany was comparable with the England of former days. But it was quite arguable

that the new German Empire was a more formidable combination, lying as it did close-knit in the very centre of European civilisation, than the loose and rather casual structure which acknowledged the sway of the first English monarch to assume the Imperial title.

If we examine the positive achievements of Beaconsfield with the detachment possible at this date, the triumphs for which he was applauded seem unspeakably trivial. It was nothing that for a few years Southern Bulgaria should be called Eastern Rumelia. The retention of Turkey in Europe was the mere perpetuation of a wasting fever. The unsatisfied ambitions of the Balkan peoples led, after a generation of uneasiness, to a frightful explosion. The gift of Bosnia to Austria provided the match which was to start that explosion and wreck Europe. It is only when we consider the things which were invisible to contemporaries that Beaconsfield's true services can be discerned. He showed amazing wisdom in avoiding the traps constantly set for him by Bismarck. His refusal to take Egypt, which was constantly being dangled before him, has often been quoted to his discredit. It was, in fact, the thing which above all others proves that even in extreme old age, and when his vision was most distorted by racial prejudice, he had not lost his old intuition. From the first he marked Bismarck as the one dangerous enemy, and Bismarck's Prussian duplicity was no match for the veteran guile of the Oriental.

Gladstone attacked, as an "insane proposal," the agreement by which England took Cyprus and agreed in return to protect Turkey in Asia. Beaconsfield's reply suggests that the general worship had produced in him a quite unusual intoxication :

Which do you believe the most likely to enter into an insane convention—a body of English gentlemen honoured by the favour of their Sovereign and the confidence of their fellow subjects, managing your affairs for five years, I hope with prudence, and not altogether without success, or a sophistical rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own

verbosity, and gifted with an egotistical imagination that can at all times command an interminable and inconsistent series of arguments to malign an opponent and to glorify himself?

Gladstone, writing for an explanation of this astounding attack, received as answer only a sarcastically phrased third-person message. Beaconsfield could indeed afford for the moment to treat Gladstone with contempt. The populace and the classes were at one in magnifying him, while Gladstone seemed to have sunk to be the oracle of a few Nonconformist congregations and a number of Ritualistic clergymen.

On his return from Berlin the Queen gave him the Garter, as well as a quantity of flowers from Osborne. A proffered dukedom he declined. "What does our Ben know about dukes?" By 1878 he knew at least this much—that a poor duke was ridiculous, and that a duke of any kind was not quite the important person he once had been. To his credit Beaconsfield was still all too poor for even an earldom. He had more reason than Clive to be "astounded at his own moderation." Enjoying opportunities which, had he deigned to use them, might have brought him gigantic fortune, he had remained always poor and sometimes embarrassed. In close touch with the great House of Rothschild, only his pride and virtue stood in the way of his enrichment. Had he condescended to the attitude of several considerable twentieth-century statesmen he could, without more than "indelicacy," have drawn immense profit from speculation on hints which the best-informed of financiers would have been most ready to give. When we consider that in youth he had been a stock-gambler, and that he had experienced during the greater part of his life the sharpest inconvenience from want of "rascal counters," it is much that no shadow of suspicion ever rested on him. The story goes that he was once approached with a proposition of a kind which would have meant great profits for himself as well as for others—"Once," says Froude, "but never again." His reply was too discouraging for a repetition of the incident. For money

he cared nothing, save as a means of procuring better things; and, though he had large ideas and the sumptuous manner, his personal habits were simple and he lacked vices. So, though the expansiveness of his disposition kept him always poor, there was not added that extravagance which evaporates all but the largest means, and his pride never permitted him to be so poor as to be forced to sell honour. In the end he died worth £80,000, but there was a mortgage of £57,000 on Hughenden, and the difference between the two sums was mainly a matter of profits from the sale of his novels. All these facts must be considered in the final estimate of his character. With his personal cleanness he could afford an occasional economy in political scruple.

Many writers have debated why Beaconsfield did not dissolve at the end of the 1878 Session, when his popularity was at its height. He was no purist to esteem it a defect of taste to seek a party victory on "Peace with Honour." Probably the explanation is simply to be found in his physical state. He was too tired to face an election. With gout and bronchitis as his daily companions he had scarcely the energy to read. "The lightest social excitement," he wrote to Lady Chesterfield in August, "injures me."¹ The exhaustion which had fallen on him made his triumph an empty thing. Long years before he had described Contarini Fleming's wild joy after gaining a spectacular victory over the assembled statesmen of Europe. That elation he was never to feel in his own person. He was too old; no doubt also he understood too well the real flimsiness of his seemingly splendid performance. His letters to Salisbury suggest that his mind was full of foreboding regarding Bismarck, checked but not checkmated.

"The grand chance," says Froude, "had been given to English Conservatism, and had been lost in a too ambitious dream." The year 1878 saw the last of the

¹ Buckle, vol. vi.

Government's essays in domestic reform. The Factory and Workshop Act, by absolutely forbidding the employment of children under ten, and limiting older children to half-time, was quite in the spirit of *Sybil*. Shaftesbury declared that millions would bless the day when Cross went to the Home Office, but of this gratitude a large share is surely due to the Prime Minister who had so long contended against the Radical plutocrats.

The fight, however, was almost finished. Realities at home were perforce neglected in the pursuit of shadows abroad. The character of a Prime Minister influences the character of his subordinates, and when he has struck the note of policy he is often compelled, by the imitative energy of inferior minds, to carry things farther than he wishes. Thus it was with Beaconsfield. Cabinet, party, and officialdom were now all imbued with what they conceived to be the Disraelian spirit. Unfortunately, however, the school-piece is never the equal of the master-performance, and while it was easy to imitate the vices of Beaconsfield it was impossible to reproduce his skill, caution, and essential moderation. The two last years of his administration were darkened by small wars which were not so very small, brought about by the restlessness or maladroitness of ambitious agents.

The Afghan war was one for which Beaconsfield had partly to thank himself. He had sent Lord Lytton to India with instructions to pursue a "forward" policy, or in other words to bring Afghanistan within the orbit of British influence as a counter-move to the Russian advance in Turkestan. Shere Ali, the Amir, appears to have been anxious only to be let alone. He was, as an Anglo-Indian official said to Lord Salisbury, "an earthen pipkin between two iron pots," and much afraid of being broken. When Lytton sent a military Mission to his frontiers, with a pressing offer of British protection, he began to intrigue with agents of the Czar, and a few weeks

after the signing of the Berlin Treaty General Stolatoff appeared at the Court of Cabul. By this time Beaconsfield was in no mood for Asiatic embroilments, but Lytton, not realising that circumstances alter cases, remained under the impression that he must still be "forward."

Beaconsfield told the Queen, in the late summer of 1878, that he no longer felt the "continuous flow of power" necessary for his position.¹ The truth of this admission is seen in his curious attitude to Lytton. He was annoyed by, and yet he seemed to relish, the persistency of the Viceroy. At one moment deploring his rashness, at another he was admiring his firmness. Always afraid Lytton might go too far, he never contrived a sufficient halter to restrain him. At last an ultimatum was sent to the Amir, insisting on the reception of the British Mission, and Beaconsfield, while waiting a reply, made an extraordinary speech announcing the need of a "scientific frontier" for North-Western India, thus admitting that if war followed it would be a war for the express purpose of annexing Afghan territory. Several of his colleagues were horrified, but Beaconsfield was gleeful. "The party," he wrote to Lady Bradford, "is what is called on its legs again, and Jingoism is triumphant."¹ Probably the explanation of all this curious alternation of moods, this sandwiching of caution and recklessness, is to be found in his state of health. Physically, he needed tranquillity; mentally, he could no longer live without the stimulus of excitement.

War followed in due course. It was strongly opposed by the Liberals, and Hartington satirised Lytton as "mimicking at Delhi the fallen state of the Mogul Empire." Fortunately Russia made no move to complicate matters; the English troops were well led; and after Roberts had defeated the Afghan forces at Peiwar Khotal Shere Ali fled, and peace was signed with Yakub Khan, his successor. "We have secured a scientific and adequate frontier for our Indian

¹ Buckle, vol. vi.

Empire," Beaconsfield wrote to Lytton, but before the letter reached India Major Cavagnari, who had been sent to Cabul as British representative, had been murdered with all his staff and guard. The weary business had to be begun once again. Stewart and Roberts again distinguished themselves, and in the end the Afghans were thoroughly beaten outside Kandahar, but by that time a Liberal Government was in power, England was weary of the war, and the troops evacuated Kandahar, leaving behind yet another Amir to reign at Cabul.

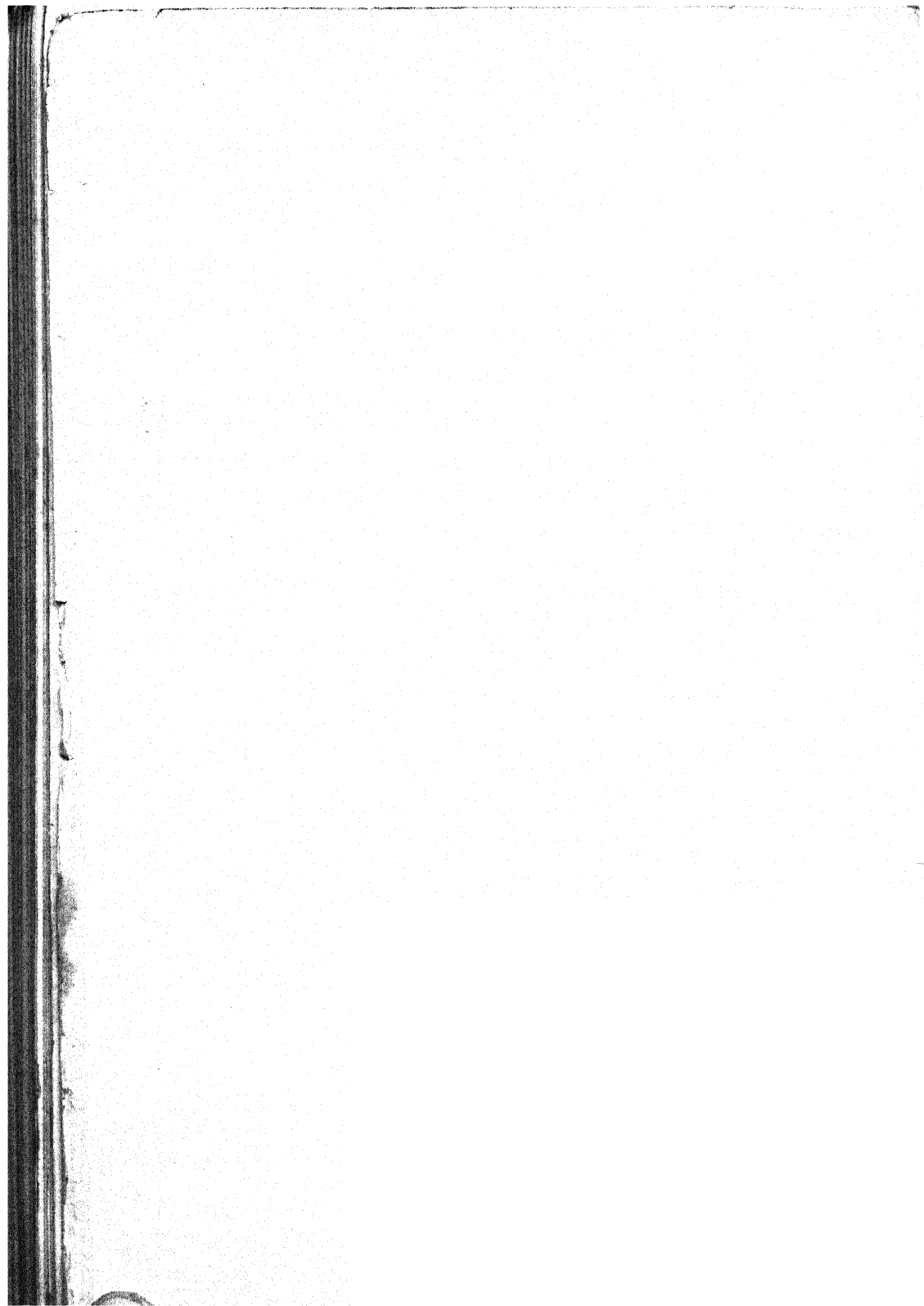
The Zulu War, though better justified, was far less well managed. The year 1877 had seen the annexation of the bankrupt South African Republic, and with Boer territory the British Government took over the Boer quarrel with the Zulu king, Cetewayo. South Africa had been one of Carnarvon's hobbies when at the Colonial Office. Beaconsfield, who called Carnarvon "Tatters," and could never take him quite seriously, was in an almost comic state of despair when he found what liabilities the noble earl had acquired with the doubtful advantage of a few thousand disaffected new subjects. He would undoubtedly have kept the peace had it been possible. This kind of enterprise had no kind of attraction for him. In India he could take an interest, but South African barbarism and semi-barbarism were too crude for his highly civilised taste. By the time his attention had been directed to the question, however, things had gone too far. Sir Bartle Frere, the High Commissioner for South Africa, was an able and conscientious administrator, but afflicted by that malady which some future light in psycho-analysis may distinguish as the proconsular complex. Magnifying the importance of South Africa, as part of the importance of himself, his imagination was troubled by the vision of an appalling struggle in the near future between all the blacks on the one side and all the whites on the other. That very dangerous



THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD

Photo W. & D. Downey

Frontispiece



combination, an earnest Imperialist and a deeply religious man, Frere looked on the extension of British territory and the spread of the Gospel as objects equally sacred and for all practical purposes identical. To him the Zulus represented at once a danger to the Empire and an obstacle to the evangelisation of Africa. Beaconsfield, as might have been expected, viewed them with more humour. "A very remarkable people, the Zulus," he said once, "they defeat our generals, they convert our bishops, they have settled the fate of a great European dynasty." It may be noted that Colenso, the converted Bishop, had convinced himself while in South Africa not only of the falsity of the Pentateuch but of the gentleness of Cetewayo's subjects. Considering that Zulu braves were compelled to a strict celibacy until they had earned the right to marry by washing their spears in an adversary's blood, there appears to have been more ground for Frere's very opposite conclusions. Frere saw no hope except in the disbandment of the Zulu army. Cetewayo refused to disband, and war resulted. "Extremely inconvenient," was the Prime Minister's comment.

The annihilation of a British column of eight hundred at Isandhlana was more than inconvenient. To Beaconsfield it was "unintelligible," and the news for some time prostrated him. Both publicly and privately he blamed Frere, whom, however, he left at his post. Fortunately for him the Liberals, whose true policy would have been to arraign the Government, could not resist the temptation of assailing a public servant in whom they detected the taint of Imperialism, and thus aided the Cabinet found it easy to shift the burden of responsibility on to the shoulders of the man on the spot.

The Zulu War led to a tiff—the most serious in the history of their relationship—between the Queen and Beaconsfield. The Prime Minister soon transferred the bulk of his indignation to Lord Chelmsford, the British commander in the field. Chelmsford was one of those generals whom Ministers dislike because they are

always asking for reinforcements, and he was certainly no genius. Beaconsfield decided that he should be superseded by Garnet Wolseley, who, young and ambitious, might be expected to win victories without bothering the War Office for men. In addition, Wolseley was to take over most of Frere's functions. The Queen did not like the arrangement. It savoured of surrender to the outcry which had followed Isandhlana, and, to her imperious nature, anything like deference to popular clamour was hateful. However, Beaconsfield decided to have his way, and when repeated doses of flattery produced no effect he ventured on a respectful defiance.

In fact, Chelmsford contrived to win the war before Wolseley arrived in Africa, but on his return Beaconsfield refused to see him. The Queen, on the other hand, received the unfortunate General at Osborne, and sent to Frere a copy of the Prince Consort's *Life*. The death of the French Prince Imperial, killed by a Zulu spear while serving in the British Army, caused further trouble between Monarch and Minister. The body, on the Queen's command, was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Bath, and given high military honours on its return to England. Beaconsfield, with his eye on Republican France, deprecated this display of sympathy as injudicious, and there was a tartness on both sides which had been absent from the most excited moments of the Russian crisis.

The state of trade made these expensive and inglorious wars the more unpopular. The artificial industrial system, on which England was more and more depending, could only remain stable so long as the rest of the world, in high cabal, conspired to uphold it. If other nations were so inconsiderate as to order their politics without regard to British needs, if they preferred to fight among themselves, instead of trading with the English, if they fancied steel more than cotton, Manchester must suffer, and it was no adequate compensation that there might be an incidental demand

at Sheffield for bowie knives or at Birmingham for rifles. During the middle and late 'seventies foreign nations, once so obliging, had been seriously forgetful of British wants. They had gone to war. They had erected new tariffs. They had "destroyed confidence" and rent the "delicate fabric of international credit." As a consequence distress and unemployment had prevailed among a population multiplied to excess during the years of brisk trade.

A long period of peace, as things turned out, followed the Russo-Turkish War, and British manufacturers, though their supremacy was challenged, recovered, and even prospered, in an absolute though not in a relative sense, more than ever. But for the time being the trouble was grave, and its effect was the more heavily felt because agricultural depression had now begun in earnest. For many years the effect of Corn Law Repeal had been disguised by the natural protection involved in the mere distance over sea food supplies had to be carried to the home markets. Invention, however, had now marvellously reduced the cost of transportation; the British farmer was beginning to find that intense culture could not, in an old, highly rented, heavily taxed country, prevail against the competitor who paid next to nothing for his land and saved labour by slovenly methods. A succession of bad harvests brought the trouble to a head. Beaconsfield was finding his prophecies fulfilled. But it was small comfort to him to recall that in the days of Peel he had almost exactly predicted all that was now coming to pass. Of practical counsel he had none. He was too old, weary, and disillusioned to give sympathetic attention to those who now talked about "Fair Trade" as an alternative to "Free Trade." When his own speeches were quoted he spoke derogatively of "rusty phrases," flatly refused legislation, and did two of the things always done by tired or stupid politicians. He talked about the nation being saved by its own energy and he agreed to the appointment of a Royal Commission.

This was certainly not the Disraeli of the past, but the problem was baffling, and to-day it is even farther from solution. Better times for the agriculturists must mean, for the moment at any rate, worse times for the townsmen, and the townsmen, themselves at the mercy of every twist and turn in foreign affairs, were predominant. Beaconsfield in his prime might have been equal to difficulties which none of his successors have been able to grapple. But his eyes had waxed dim, and his hams were those of an old man. Time had been when he would have welcomed any such tendency as that illustrated in the Radical plan derided as "three acres and a cow." He might have decided to "dish the Whigs" to genuine purpose. Now he could only oppose them with a fantastic theory in which landlord, farmer, and labourer figured as a kind of divinely appointed trinity to displace which would be sacrilege. It was all a little pathetic. He who fifty years ago had predicted the decay of Beaumanoir had now arrived at the standpoint of Beaumanoir in its decay. In truth he was himself by now little but a ruin, though a picturesque one, and the waning of his powers could not be more decisively attested than by this failure to seize on an opportunity, or this despair of impressing it on the only party which could deal fundamentally with land reform—a question which the Radicals, bound as they were to the industrialism they had erected, were unable then or later to attack on bold and comprehensive lines.

Yet if he indulged a fatalistic lethargy at home, he maintained to the end a certain grip on foreign affairs. This was shown in the autumn of 1879 by his reception of Bismarck's overtures for a triple alliance of Germany, Austria, and Great Britain. Bismarck, believing Beaconsfield to be preoccupied with the East, suggested this scheme as a check on Russian aggression. Beaconsfield, while quite willing to enter into an understanding that would counter any possible designs of Russia, would hear of nothing which might imply hostility to France. This, of course, failed to satisfy

Bismarck, whose only object was a guarantee against the revival of the French power, and the plan was therefore dropped. Beaconsfield was largely responsible for the notion that the basis of British policy must be an understanding with Germany, but he never contemplated that subservience to Berlin which afterwards became the mark of British statesmanship; and he never forgot for long that France, being Britain's nearest neighbour, must be either her most useful friend or her most dangerous enemy.

Early in 1880 the Government, encouraged by the success of Mr. (afterwards Sir Edward) Clarke in a South London by-election, decided on dissolution. On the eve of the election Beaconsfield issued his manifesto in the shape of a letter to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Ireland was suffering yet more severely than England from agricultural distress; the Land League, with its cry of "No Rent," was at its full strength, and in the House of Commons Stafford Northcote had been utterly unable to cope with the obstructionist methods of Parnell, Biggar, and O'Donnell. The Prime Minister now called on "all men of light and leading" to resist the attempt which was being made "to sever the Constitutional tie" which united Ireland to Britain "in that bond which has favoured the power and prosperity of both." The document was badly worded, and its only effect was to turn the whole Irish vote against the Conservatives. Moreover, the insinuations it contained were unjust, for, though a Liberal candidate at Liverpool had declared himself in sympathy with Home Rule, the Liberal Party generally was still firm for the Union. There appeared, therefore, no reason why on this issue people should vote Conservative, and the cry, in fact, merely provoked ridicule. Yet, poorly as the manifesto was conceived for its immediate purpose, it was strangely prescient. Either Beaconsfield had made a wondrously lucky shot in the dark or he had written in a moment of extraordinary intuition. He had divined that one party or the other must in the next few years take up the

Irish cause on a new basis, and he foresaw that the Liberals were the more likely to be converted. Almost alone among the politicians of his age, he had understood that there was an Irish Question which could be settled neither by bribes nor handcuffs.

It was soon clear that Beaconsfield had wholly misapprehended the feeling of the country. Overwhelmed at the polls, he resigned without waiting for the adverse vote of the new House of Commons. The Queen was appalled. The tiff over Zululand was forgotten; only the pleasant excitements of the first glorious years of Disraeli's premiership were remembered. The electorate's verdict implied a parting which had much of the finality and not a little of the bitterness of death. In the nature of things her favourite could not return to her side, and unless at her side he could not, by Constitutional usage, remain a favourite, or even in any vital sense a friend. Small wonder if the Queen in her soul exclaimed against the hard fate of a limited monarch, or in open fury raged against the coming of Gladstone—of Gladstone the prolix and prosy, whose enormous energy at once terrified and irritated, who never sent a sword to one of the little princes or asked after a dog or a canary, who cared nothing for "harbingers of spring" or "faery gifts," who quoted Blue Books and Acts of Parliament, and regarded herself as the embodiment of the Act of Settlement. It was a nightmare, she declared, and when the Board of Trade was allotted to one Joseph Chamberlain, a declared Republican, her horror was complete.

Beaconsfield was disappointed but philosophical—more stoical, indeed, at the moment than he was to show himself some months later. What annoyed him most was the importunity of his followers for jobs and titles. Those for whom he had a personal liking he rewarded with delight. For the mere party man, whom he had known well enough how to use, he had nothing but scorn, and at the last he allowed himself the luxury of showing his contempt.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUT a single year of life remained to Beaconsfield after the downfall of his Government. Quit of office, he quietly returned to his work as a novelist, setting out to finish the book called *Endymion*, which he had left half written when he arrived at power in 1874.

The critics who have over-rated *Lothair* have underrated *Endymion*. It is an old man's book, and a book of memories ; but it is informed by a sincerity which the earlier volume lacks ; and though Disraeli wanted money, and was promised £10,000 in advance for the novel, it is pretty certain that, if he did not write it to please himself, he pleased himself in writing it. *Endymion* has dignity, wit, and wisdom, and that proud detachment which betokens the man who has no object but to tell the truth as he sees it. There is no axe to grind, no party Moloch to placate, no popular prejudice to flatter.

Indeed, the most curious point of *Endymion* is that, written by a Tory leader, it has a Whig hero, and comments through Whig characters on the events of the 'thirties, 'forties, and 'fifties. Its tone is gently and probably unconsciously cynical. *Endymion*, the hero, is well connected, the son and grandson of a Privy Councillor, but suffers in early life from a lack of money. He is a colourless person, with no strong convictions, and though he happens to be a Whig there is no particular reason why he should not have been a Tory. Good-looking and industrious, he has neither conspicuous ability nor strength of character. His own parts would not have carried him far. But women like his face and manner ; a tailor dresses him on credit as a speculation ; and in due time he arrives. He has

not found either his poverty or his want of genius much of a handicap.

Endymion is very far from being the author's self; yet in drawing the figure Beaconsfield must surely have had the thought of his early self before him. Early lack of funds was the case common to the character and its creator. But while Beaconsfield had brilliance and imagination Endymion was blessed only with steadiness and a good pedigree. Beaconsfield makes it clear that in his view the compensation was more than adequate. In this book he deals freely and without remorse with the Young England group, of which he was once leader, confessing its futility in the field of real politics. The moral of the book, in fact, may well be that genius and vision do not pay. He himself had them, and required them, but that was only because of his special circumstances. A Jew of his day had need of these things. For a young English aristocrat they were superfluous—perhaps even detrimental. And he himself, once established, had had comparatively little use for them either. He might have been more comfortable had he more readily fallen in with the jog-trot of the mediocrities. There is little bitterness in the political musings—the author is too old to care much about anything—but there is some sadness.

From another point of view the book is a woman-lover's tribute to women. The importance of woman's part in the making of a man's career is emphasised almost on every page. Endymion's sister Myra is, of course, his own sister Sara, and there are many others, all engaged in the pleasant duty of helping a young man to success. And yet the novel is curiously sexless. In most Victorian fiction sex is heavily veiled, but one is mostly aware that the veiling is deliberate. But except in *Vivian Grey*, *The Young Duke*, and *Henrietta Temple*, Beaconsfield seems to have forgotten its existence, and in the two first of these books it appears to have been introduced more out of youthful naughtiness than from any realisation of its natural

place in life. In *Endymion* there are many marriages, flirtations, and friendships of men with women, but the people show no sign of being of like passions with the common run of the human race. Here, for instance, are the hero's feelings in regard to the woman—a beautiful and wealthy widow—whom he is anon to marry :

Under the immediate influence of her presence, he became spell-bound as of yore, and in the intoxication of her beauty, the brightness of her mind, and her ineffable attraction, he felt he would be content with any lot, provided he might retain her kind thoughts and pass much of his life in her society.

Did ever a young man feel thus ? Could middle age be so content ? Beaconsfield, of course, was a very old man when he wrote these words, but his memory was clear enough, and age, whatever else it may be, is not given to idealisation of sex. One is forced to conclude that at no time of his life, except, perhaps, in the brief period of the Henrietta affair, would he have found any incongruity in such phrases. *Endymion* goes far to explain his relations with women. It is the tribute of a grateful but peculiarly constituted votary. It is also a tribute to the tailor. Women and clothes together make or mar the man, and *Endymion* is the kind of man they are most likely to make in nineteenth-century England.

Several of the minor characters are interesting. The sketch of St. Barbe is a mordant but not specially unjust satire of Thackeray, for whom Beaconsfield, for some reason, had no kindness. He could laugh good-humouredly at Dickens as Gushy and dismiss him, but he sufficiently disliked Thackeray to spend much time and ingenuity in exposing his weaknesses. The young St. Barbe, who complains that "gentlemen and men of education" should be reduced to earn a living, and boasts to a new acquaintance that there were "several dignitaries of the Church and one Admiral" in his family ; the middle-aged St. Barbe,

who stands arrogantly in a room decorated with cards of invitation and vaunts that the world is at his feet ; the elderly St. Barbe, full of sneers for his benefactors and envy for his rivals—these are indeed not Thackeray, but they do represent certain things in Thackeray. The book contains one notable lapse from the sincerity which otherwise marks it. Beaconsfield introduces a group of the Rothschild family, somewhat idealised but quite recognisable. Yet he insists on representing them as Swiss settlers. By 1880 he had lost the frankness of his impetuous youth.

The book apart, he allowed himself little rest. His duties as leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords were not exacting, and his failing health often obliged him to neglect them, but his mind was constantly occupied with politics, and especially with the less elevated aspects of politics. His hatred for Gladstone at this time assumed almost the stage of obsession. To have been worsted by Hartington would not have wounded him, but defeat at Gladstone's hands was bitter. In the last months one finds him as much of a Die-Hard as the stout-hearted Mr. Buck could have been. The Liberals and all their works are anathema. The relatively harmless Ground Game Act, which allowed a farmer to shoot hares and rabbits on his land, appears to him the "most devilish of the Arch-Villain's schemes."¹ In his private correspondence "Arch-Villain" or "the A.-V.," always signifies Gladstone, who is seldom mentioned in any other way.

Towards the end of 1880 he expressed the opinion that "Old England" was "tumbling to pieces,"¹ but this was little more than the familiar plaint of the club-window veteran. "Old England," of course, was in truth tumbling to pieces, had mostly tumbled already ; and his term of office, what with his

¹ Buckle, vol. vi.

diminished vigour and his taste for fireworks, had done little to check the process. If he meant that the new British Empire was in any special danger because the Liberals had decided to evacuate Kandahar he was talking nonsense. In fact, he meant nothing of the kind; against the peevishness of the moment his considered opinion may be quoted. For in his last important speech in the House of Lords he declared in a memorable phrase that the "keys of India" were in London. The expression was borrowed, like so many of his expressions, but it is likely that the conviction of its truth was in his mind. In spite of *Tancred*, in spite of the Royal Titles Act, in spite of all the glittering dreams of an Asiatic Empire, there seems to have come back to him at the end a realisation that poor, neglected England mattered most:

My lords, the key of India is not Herat or Kandahar. The key of India is London. The majesty and sovereignty, the spirit and vigour of your Parliament, the inexhaustible resources, the ingenuity and determination of your people—these are the keys of India.

He still devoted himself to society. To many who casually met him he appeared a merely pathetic figure, deaf and doddering. A few, who possessed the power to rouse some spark of the old Disraeli, found him still charming: "very pretty and polite in all his ways and all he said," says Dilke. To those beginning life he was uniformly gracious; the man who looked the image of death seemed to find a fascination in youth. For Dilke, the rising young Radical, he foresaw a great career, and, it is said, he had him as a study for the hero of *Endymion*. His last visit to the House of Commons was taken to see the Fourth Party in action. He admired Balfour, and was fond of Randolph Churchill, while he had long shown his full appreciation of Gorst's abilities. With the revolt of the Fourth Party against the sedate leadership of Northcote he felt a sympathy he could not conceal. "I was

never respectable myself," he said to Drummond Wolff.

For a while after leaving Downing Street he occupied a suite of apartments in the house of Alfred de Rothschild, but afterwards took on long lease a house in Curzon Street, which he furnished with elaborate bad taste. His last speech in the House of Lords was made in seconding a vote of condolence to the Queen on the assassination of the Czar. All things considered, there was suitable irony in this exit from public life.

At last came the fated chill, caught in returning from one of those dinners in which the lonely old man sought refuge from tedium. For nearly four weeks he lay ill, a gentle and amiable patient, listening with pleasure to the reading of the Parliamentary reports by one or other of his secretaries. The Queen sent him primroses and a letter signed "Ever yours very aff^y V.R.I.," in which she explained that she had only refrained from a "little visit" because it was better that he should be "quite quiet," and begged that he would be "very good and obey the doctors."

Lady Bradford paid her "little visit"; hers was the last woman's face on which his eyes rested. Visitors found the ghost of the old manner, and occasionally there came a flash of the wit which had set the table in a roar. But his strength was fast ebbing, and there were long intervals of silence. Sometimes, it would seem, his thoughts were on things recent and formal. On one occasion, when he received a letter from the Queen, he showed himself still conscious of the etiquette which is to the statesman what discipline is to the soldier, and bids him use his last effort of will in a salute. But the mind of a dying man cannot always play the courtier, and in his musings the figure of the Queen he had found and the Empress he had made must have been jostled by a crowd of humbler ghosts. To those in health who wearily await the coming of sleep the

cinema of the brain in its flickering irrelevance confuses all values, so that there is a stab of pathos in the recollection of an old pun, and an old heart-ache is remembered with half a smile. So, perhaps, it was with the sick man. His wandering fancy may have passed lightly over the garish panorama tableaux of the great Premiership—"Peace with Honour," the uniforms and stars of Berlin, the shouting crowds at Downing Street, the blushes and courtesies of the Empress-Queen—to scenes humbler and more remote. Perhaps the things which had made him great seemed smaller in retrospect than the things he shared with the little. Gladstone, the "Arch-Villain," with his stately moralities and prolixities; Derby, the tool whom he had yet to call master, with his gout and his vacillations; Palmerston, with his flippant masterfulness; Bentinck, the direful but chivalrous comrade; Peel, the dignified victim; Manners and Smythe, Chandos, and Lyndhurst, and O'Connell, and Murray may have had small part in such an inconsequent review of half a century of aspiration and strife. Clearer even may have been the figures of old comrades in the rackety days of the Blessington salon; clearer, almost certainly, the long-vanished Henrietta, who taught him, if only for a moment, that ambition is a lesser thing than passion; as clear, and yet more gracious, the warm-hearted if eccentric wife who proved to him the mighty power of quietly devoted female affection. But possibly the mind of the dying man turned most persistently, with the egotistical pity age feels for its own youth, to the school at Walthamstow, with its hopes, its yearnings, and its immature agonies, and to the old Jewish home, with sister Sara, and old Isaac, the mild, spectacled book-worm, and the terrible old woman who never had a gentle thought or a kind word for anybody. There had been many Disraelis since then to fret their hour on stages large and small. But father of all of them was the little Benjamin who loved his father, idolised his sister, trembled before his grand-dame, and cowered under

the blows of rough Christian boys until he had learned to avenge them.

He died in the early morning of April 19, 1881, in the presence of the doctors and of his two secretaries, Rowton and Barrington, and of his friend, Sir Philip Rose, on whose aid he had so often relied in private business and in the details of party management. A quarter of an hour earlier he had raised himself in bed and his lips had moved. Those who surrounded him had a fancy that he was attempting to make a speech, but no word was heard. Dr. Kidd, who attended him, left a statement to the effect that he died in the true faith of a Christian :—

To myself sitting by his bed at night he spoke twice on spiritual matters, in a manner indicating his appreciation of the work of Christ and of the Redemption.¹

The honour of a public funeral was suitably offered by a Liberal Government, and still more suitably refused when among his intimate papers was found a letter from his wife expressing a wish that they should share one grave at Hughenden. To the village churchyard his remains were carried by tenants of the estate, and there followed the Prince of Wales and others of the Royal Family, nearly all the members of the late Conservative Cabinet, Harcourt for the Government (Gladstone was ill), and most of the great men of the day. The Queen's wreath of primroses was prominent on the coffin. Four days later she herself visited the grave, and at her private expense was erected in Hughenden Church the memorial on which are inscribed the words, "Kings love him that speaketh right." She at least—his "grateful Sovereign and friend"—had had little to quarrel with in any of the words of the great courtier-statesman.

The tributes in Parliament by Gladstone, Granville,

¹ *Nineteenth Century*, July, 1899.

and others were as generous and as inapposite as such things always are. Salisbury's oft-quoted dictum that "Zeal for the greatness of England was the passion of his life" yields little enlightenment. Had any of these great men in a moment of mad frankness risen to declare that he whom they were praising was the one unquestionable genius of his age among the statesmen of England, but that the fame of his practical statesmanship would be dim long before his qualities as a writer and thinker had been fully recognised; that he was the strangest mixture of prophet and comedian; that his make-believes and insincerities, though they were many, were superficial, and that his honesty was fundamental; that he served England as well as she allowed him, that he learned to love England, but could never feel for her as son feels for mother; that he had always an imperfect sympathy with the party he led, and indeed with the party system itself; that he had proved himself in most respects a man of honour and fine feeling, but in all respects a Jew—if this had been said, everybody would have been profoundly shocked, but something near the truth would have been told.

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